

CONFESSING

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OUR FAITH
AROUND THE WORLD

II



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II

With an introduction by Anton Houtepen

Edited by Hans-Georg Link

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PREFACE

At its meeting in Lima, Peru, in January 1982, the Commission on Faith and Order decided to focus its attention during the coming years on the theme "Towards the common expression of the apostolic faith today". The topic itself is not new; it had already been tackled at the First World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne in 1927 under the heading "The Church's Common Confession of Faith". Since then, among other things, interim results have been achieved which point the way ahead: the statement "A Common Account of Hope" (Bangalore 1978) and the convergence statements on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (Lima 1982). The only new feature is that the original theme after these and other preliminary work has been deliberately taken up and is to be developed further. In the working paper from Lima three emphases emerged:

1. the common recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed in the Nicene Creed;
2. the common explication of this apostolic faith in contemporary situations of the churches;
3. the common confessing of the apostolic faith today.

The series "Confessing our Faith around the World" is in the context of the second emphasis. Its aim is to collect new expressions of the apostolic faith in the 20th century from all over the world, to publish them and to contribute thus to mutual ecumenical enrichment. The first volume of confessions of faith "around the world" was edited by C.S. Song and was published in 1980 as Faith and Order Paper No. 104. Further collections, each from a particular continent, are to follow during the next few years: Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe etc.

The present second volume of the series offers - like the first - a wide spectrum of the manifold ways of confessing the apostolic faith today "around the world". It has been developed in the context of the work of the Inter-University Institute for Missiology and Ecumenism in Utrecht/Leiden (Netherlands) on "Credal Witness in Context" under the leadership of Professor Marc Spindler. Dr Anton Houtepen has compiled this collection, written the introduction and introduces each document. Our profound thanks goes to him and his collaborators, Dr P. Kattenberg and Dr P. Hoogeveen, for their valuable help and firm commitment in the common search for expressing the apostolic faith today.

I very much hope that this collection of texts will enable many readers to be enriched, challenged and encouraged in their own believing and confessing by the testimonies to faith offered here.

Geneva, November 1983

Hans-Georg Link

INTRODUCTION

The unity of the Church and the Christian community - in the biblical sense of 'koinonia' - are fundamentally based on the participation of all church members and of all churches in the one initiative of grace which God works in our human history. Amidst innumerable uncertainties and fears, doubts and longings, pains and struggles, the Christian faith is an answer of trust, a password of hope against fatalism. Christian faith and hope are the human response to this grace of God, sometimes hidden, sometimes revealed to us, but once for all set before us in Jesus Christ. Through him and following him, we are engaged in and called to liberation, salvation, healing, reconciliation amidst all human failure, natural disasters, individual sins, collective faults, systematic exploitation, violent killing, and apocalyptic threat. It is first of all this responsible commitment to God's history of liberation, at any given time in history, in many historical and personal circumstances and in various cultural, political and social contexts, which we call "faith". It is a living practice of loving, caring, healing, guiding, rescuing, helping people in their struggles, pains and fears "in the name of God" and as "disciples of Jesus Christ". So we are sealed and blessed as partakers of God's Messianic Promise and thus we earn a fundamental joy, freedom and peace, which enable us to serve God and humankind.

Christianity has often forgotten the fundamental truth that "faith" is not "gnosis" or "theory", not "higher education" or "mysterious knowledge", but life and love according to God's orientations given to us through the faith of Israel and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Minority groups, charismatic revivals, liberation movements and spiritual reforms recall the churches time and again to this fundamental idea of "faith" and "confession": to do the will of God, to live in fear for the Lord. Some methods of teaching and preaching, mainly in the Northern part of the world, seem to forget that the faith of Israel was rooted in the experience of illiterate nomads and unschooled migrant workers before it was written down in sacred histories, codes of law, poetic prayers and prophetic teachings; and that the Gospel of Jesus was first preached to Galilean fishermen, Judean guerrilleros, campesinos in the rural areas of Palestine and to the crippled, the poor, the prostituted people of Israel's hellenized cities, before it was heard, interpreted and disputed by scribes and Pharisees and before it was transmitted, explicated and magnificently defended by the authors of the New Testament. Before any oral or written tradition and redaction, there is a "hearing tradition" which translates God's orientations and Jesus' message into a praxis of life. It is this "hearing tradition" (*fides ex auditu*) which is the essential mark of Israel's fundamental creed in Deuteronomy 6:3-5: "Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them; that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your father, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (RSV)

It would be a false conclusion, however, to consider any formulation of faith, any conceptual evaluation and study on Christian life and practice, any dogma or article of faith, any recognized official confessional document as irrelevant for faith. Word and Scripture, Creeds and Confessions, are the instruments of the "hearing tradition". It is necessary to spell out our faith according to the challenges of the context, to repeat the content of it to each other in order to have a communication of faith between people all over the world and through all ages.

In fact, we know such confessions from the Scriptures. They have accompanied the "hearing tradition" from the very beginning. Where people meet and communicate about their deepest orientations amidst fear and struggle, they coin passwords, keywords of their commitment, cries of love and hope. The historical creeds and confessions of the churches, those which they have in common and those which were written in times of struggle between them and reformation among them, served originally as such "passwords" for mutual recognition, common hope and commitment. They served as "symbols" for mutual understanding and common witness. They were adopted to avoid certain false interpretations of the Gospel and false life-orientations connected with them. They were never intended to replace the faith commitment, or to make theology superfluous. Nor had they ever the function to replace the Gospel, even when they were called "regula fidei".

In fact, we cannot isolate those "confessions" or "creeds" from the life of the churches. They function as a "rule of faith" along with the reading of the Scriptures and the celebration of the sacraments. They characterize the Christian life together with other customary prayers of the Church (especially the "Our Father"), the Christian calendar of feasts, the veneration of the Saints, the sign of the cross etc. All this is the "cement of homology": it binds together the manifold building-stones of our common tradition and it gives the various confessional traditions their distinctive colour. The creeds and confessions of the churches around the world are the instruments without which the "hearing tradition" of Christianity would be brought to silence.

In the course of history, creeds and confessions performed various functions. In the New Testament period, reflected in the confessional formulae of the Gospels and the Epistles, the doxological form prevails. The New Testament uses a technical term for such doxological confession: "homologeîn/homologia". It means a common public statement of thanksgiving and praise to God (e.g. Mt 10:32; Lk 12:8; Phil 2:11; Rom 10:9-10; 2 Cor 9:13; 1 Jn 2:23; 4:2.3.15; 2 Jn 7; Jn 9:22-12:42; Heb 13:15). As a public statement it challenges the non-believers. It may cause martyrdom and death, as was the case with Jesus himself who "witnessed before Pontius Pilate with a magnificent confession" (1 Tim 6:12-13; cf. Lk 21:13; Mt 10:18; Mk 13:9).

But soon they also had the function of summarizing the way of life and justice which had to be taught, in order to make disciples (Mt 28:19). Following the Jewish tradition, faith has to be learned; it must be taught, told, spelled out, in living memory of those who were the first prophets and martyrs,

most of all Moses, and now, after Pentecost, Jesus. We can only confess and homologize through the "memoria" of those who did it before us. This is the main force behind the "haggada", the tradition of proclaiming God's grace, the "katagellein" of the Apostles (1 Cor 11:26).

In later centuries the creeds served as framework for the catechesis in preparation for baptism which was itself a public "confession" at the risk of martyrdom. During the Middle Ages they came to be called "articles of faith" in the West. Theology was written and the teaching of the schools organized along the main lines of the Apostles' Creed. Heretics were identified through their denial of the Creeds. In East and West the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creed became the official hallmark of orthodoxy. Most modern confessions of faith are written in the same spirit and perspective.

So we meet two main forms: a more liturgical, shorter form, written as a clear doxology and for direct use in the Christian congregation; and a more elaborated, catechetical-didactical form, meant as a summary of the actual faith of the Church albeit for special purposes (the situation of a church in political tension, social injustice, the need for reunion, the defense against heresy), or born from the desire to say the old truth in ever new words.

One could ask if this process of writing new confessions is legitimate. Some churches are more hesitant than others in this regard. Of course, the relation to the ancient creeds is a serious problem. As far as we can tell from our collection of about 120 new "credal statements" from the last twenty years, there is no reason to fear that new confessions will undermine or contradict creeds of the Church.

This does not mean that there are no differences. In several new confessional statements we find a considerable emphasis on the ethical implications of the Christian faith which is rather underdeveloped in the ancient creeds. The christological article sometimes predominates; particularly where the earthly ministry of Jesus has been elaborated under the influence of the historical theology in the West.

It will be a long way for the Churches to find that common expression of the one apostolic faith for our times which would make their homologies into one common homology, as is asked from us in the Scriptures (e.g. Phil 2:5). But we hope that the "communication of faith" and the mutual exchange of confessions between churches prepare for the time when the churches can meet together with one heart and one voice.

It is with this intention that we publish now a second collection of confessions from around the world. It is not our intention either to replace the Ancient Creeds or the official "Confessions" of the churches. Nor are we wanting to make propaganda for new credal formulations. Our only aim is to enable communication between the churches about confessional articulation which is going on in many parts of the world.

Most of the texts collected in this volume have found a kind of authorization within the church where they originated either through synodical or episcopal approval or through the actual use in congregations or catechisms.

We have left out the vast field of new credal texts, written on the occasion of baptism, weddings, confirmation by individuals or groups. We have not taken up confessions, written by several theologians as a kind of summary of their theological options. Many texts, used in youth liturgical services, church conventions etc. have been published already, mainly in German and English. Of course, this kind of text has its own significance for the renewal of the language of faith. Sometimes they are "received" spontaneously. More often, however, they are ephemeral and personal in character, which makes them less suited for the "communicatio fidei".

It is our hope that the texts now in print (Confessing the Faith Around the World, I and II) will help students and scholars, bishops and pastors, Christians and people of other faiths to discover what it looks like to confess God, our Father, Jesus the Christ and the Spirit of God as the Inspirer of the community for our times.

Anton Houtepen



I A F R I C A

Declaration of Faith Presbyterian Church in South Africa (1979)

This declaration of faith was developed by the Life and Work Committee of the Presbyterian Church in South Africa. It was meant as a plea for reconciliation in the South African circumstances of 1973. It was accepted for use in worship and liturgy by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Africa, held at Cape Town in September 1979, and was sent to the presbyteries for comment. After revision, it was sent again to all presbyteries in 1981.

"We believe in God the Father
who created all the world,
who will unite all things in Christ
and who wants all people to live together
as brothers and sisters in one family.

"We believe in God the Son
who became man, died, and rose in triumph,
to reconcile all the world to God,
to break down every separating barrier
of race, culture or class,
and to unite all people into one body.

"He is exalted as Lord over all,
the only Lord over every area of man's life.
He summons both the individual and society,
both the Church and the State,
to seek reconciliation and unity between all
and justice and freedom for all.

"We believe in God the Spirit,
the pledge of God's coming Reign,
who gives the Church power to proclaim the good news
to all the world,
to love and serve all people,
to strive for justice and peace,
to warn that God judges both
the individual and the Nation,
and to summon all the world to accept God's reign
here and now."

Text in: cf. South Africa Outlook, 110 (1979), nr. 1299, 137
cf. The Expository Times 85 (1973), 343

Also in: L. Vischer (ed.), Reformed Witness Today. A Collection of Confessions and Statements of Faith issued by Reformed Churches, Bern 1982, pp. 27-28.

Theological Declaration
"Broederkring" of the Dutch Reformed
Churches in South Africa (1979)

During the 1979 Annual Convention of the "Broederkring", an anti-apartheid movement among ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, this theological declaration was accepted as a confessional basis for the struggle.

1. We believe in the God and Father of Jesus Christ who upholds the whole universe by his Word and Spirit. He struggles for his own righteousness through the obedience of human actions with regard to God and fellow man. But man fell into disobedience with regard to God and fellow man which means rejection of God's righteousness. In this respect God chooses constantly for his own righteousness and consequently stands on the side of those who are victims of justice.
2. We believe that God reveals Himself in his Word as the One who throughout history in his relationship to men binds Himself to his own justice in order to make the world a place to live in. His live-giving Word became man in Christ Jesus, through whom He breaks the power of injustice. By His Spirit He gives people the possibility to again live in obedience to his Word.
3. We believe that God gathers for Himself in this world a new people who consist of men and women whom He has liberated from oppressive powers through Jesus Christ. This people of God has the responsibility to live as the one undivided body of Christ. As God's property the church must be busy standing where God stands viz. against injustice and with those who are denied justice. To fulfil this task it is necessary that the church should constantly search after the truth of God's Word. This is true especially because we owe greater obedience to Christ than to human governments, power or ideologies.
4. In our South African situation this means that we as part of the church of Christ in this world should unflinchingly persevere for establishing God's justice. The church may, in faithful allegiance to its Head, Jesus Christ, come into conflict with human authorities. If the church has to suffer in the process we know that this is part of the way of God's people through history and that the word of Christ remains in force, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb 13:5).

Text in: Dunamis 2 (1979), 3. Cf. 3 (1980) 20-21.

Also in: L. Vischer (ed.), Reformed Witness Today, p. 22.

Doctrinal Statement of The United Church of Zambia (1965)

One of the reasons which may lead to the edition and acceptance of new creeds and confessions is the process of church union negotiations, especially with regard to so-called "mission churches". On January 16, 1965, church union was achieved between Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Zambia. At Mindolo Church the "United Church of Zambia" was solemnly constituted. This "Doctrinal Statement" is part of its Constitution.

The United Church holds the faith which the Church ever held in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the World, in whom we are saved through faith, and in accordance with the revelation of God which he made, being Himself God incarnate, it worships one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The United Church accepts the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the Creeds commonly called "Apostles' and Nicene" as witnessing to and guarding that faith which is continuously confirmed in the spiritual experience of the Church of Christ and adopts the following brief summary of our common faith, agreeable in substance with the teaching of Holy Scripture.

The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the supreme rule of faith and conduct.

There is one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, equal in power and glory, and He alone is to be worshipped.

All men are sinners and are therefore in need of salvation, and can be saved only by the grace of God through the redeeming work of Christ and the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The salvation thus wrought for us by Christ is applied to us by the Holy Spirit, who worketh faith in us, and thus uniteth us to Christ, enabling us to receive Him as he is freely offered to us in the Gospel, and to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. This salvation is for the whole man - body, mind and spirit. In His gracious work the Spirit uses all means of grace, especially the Word, the Sacraments and Prayer.

The Church is the family of all those who respond to God's calling by believing in Christ as Lord and Saviour and by worshipping Him. Of this community the Lord Jesus Christ alone is King and Head. The Church is commissioned to bring the Gospel to the whole world.

The United Church believes that, while the divine grace cannot be limited, there are two sacraments ordained by Christ and of

perpetual obligation - Baptism whereby believers and their children enter into a covenant relationship with God and the Lord's Supper whereby the family of God is continually strengthened and sustained.

The Church has authority to interpret its doctrine but always in agreement with the Word of God. Of this agreement the United Church itself through its Synod will be sole judge with due regard to liberty of opinion on matters which do not affect the fundamentals of the faith.

Text in: P. Bolink, Towards Church Union in Zambia, Franeker, 1967, pp. 393 and 401

Also in: L. Vischer (ed.), Reformed Witness Today, pp. 292-293

Our Faith

Evangelical Church of Togo (1971)

The Confession of the Evangelical Church of Togo is another example of a creed, adopted by younger churches as a sign of their independence and at the same time of their communion with the whole Christian Church.

With the Universal Church of which it is part and in accordance with the Apostles' Creed, the Evangelical Church of Togo acknowledges Jesus Christ as attested in Holy Scripture as the source of its faith.

1. We believe that God has a plan for the world in general and for humanity in particular.
2. We believe that human sin is an impediment to this plan and made the coming of a Saviour necessary.

This Saviour, the One and Only, is Jesus Christ our Lord.

3. We believe that the plan of God was accomplished in Jesus Christ and we await its full manifestation.
4. We proclaim that the Church is the community of all those who in the power of the Holy Spirit glorify God in Jesus Christ. In this way we become his witnesses and co-workers in the world.

It is this which constitutes our joy.

From the French text in: Actes du Synode de Agou-Agbetiku, Janvier 1971, pp. 53f.

(= Report of the Agou-Agbetiku Synod, January 1971)

Translated from the French
WCC Language Service

Statement of Faith

Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar

The United Church of Madagascar went through church union negotiations for several years until 1968. During that process a statement of faith was drafted which serves as a sign of the church's identity. It was approved in 1958 and officially received in 1968.

Preamble

As it seeks to declare its faith, the Church is deeply aware that its central emphasis throughout must be: "JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, IS LORD AND SAVIOUR." It confesses this faith in communion with the Christian Church throughout the world.

It acknowledges the Holy Scriptures (i.e. the Old Testament and the New Testament) to be the only source and standard of its faith and life. It also holds the Apostles' Creed. And it is conscious that it is the child of the Reformation carried out in the 16th century.

At the same time, in all humility it remembers that human speech is unable to express the revelation received from God adequately.

Therefore, the Church confesses and proclaims:

1. Its faith in one God, Father of Jesus Christ, and Father of all men in Jesus Christ. He is the Creator and Ruler of the universe, who sustains and provides for our life in His everlasting love (Mt 6:32). He is a Holy God, who does not give His glory to other (Is 42:8), and so he rejects and abominates the worship of false gods, ancestors, and idolatry (e.g. superstition, the observance of any kind of taboo, spells, divination, astrological predictions, spirit possession and trances, and the like). (1)
2. Its faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord, the only begotten Son of God (Jn 1:18); "for there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6). "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name ... for Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). Jesus Christ alone is our hope and through Him we await the final victory.
3. Its faith in the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, bringing about faith unto the new birth through which salvation is received. He is the teacher, who explains God's Word to us (Jn 14:26) and He enables us to bring forth good works to the Glory of God (Gal 5:22-23).

He is the earnest of our inheritance hereafter (Eph 1:14).

In this faith the Church worships the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God in Trinity.

The Church further accepts and proclaims:

4. The Word of God, as it manifests itself in the Holy Scripture, and according to the illumination by the Holy Spirit contains the full revelation by God to us of Himself and the work accomplished through His Son for the salvation of the world. Because of that the Church is prepared to correct and reform itself in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Scripture. Therefore, the Church rejects every doctrine which opposes it. (2)
5. That sin separates man from God, and that man's reconciliation with God was accomplished in Jesus Christ as the Scriptures proclaim: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses" (2 Cor 5:19). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16), and again, "for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).
6. Within the Church through the preaching of the Gospel, all generations receive the fruits of the saving work of Christ. For one is the Head, namely Christ, and one is the body, namely the Church. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free" (1 Cor 12:13). (3) In Christ, men of different nations and castes are all one, so there should be no divisions within the Church. For this reason we are conscious of our communion with the Church Universal. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We realize that it is the Church's duty to preach the Gospel of Christ to all men without exception, by word, the Sacraments, by works, and example. Every Christian ought to work according to the spiritual gifts he has received (1 Cor 12). Faithful is the Lord and He will fulfil this in us.
7. Jesus Christ is "the Resurrection and the Life" (Jn 11:25). He has been raised from the dead, "the first fruits of them that are asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). When a believer dies he is "in Christ" (Phil 1:22) because "neither death nor life ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead, and then will be fulfilled the promise to the faithful, "shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working of his power" (Phil 3:21).

(Doxology)

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Eph 3:20-21)

Footnotes:

- 1) The statement here gives the specific names of traditional religious rites fankatoavana, sikidy, fanandroana, tromba, bilo.
- 2) Namely the Holy Scripture. (The draft of the Statement has a reference to Mt 15:9).
- 3) The Statement here refers to 1 Cor 10:17 instead of 1 Cor 12:13. It is not really a mistake because a former draft of the Statement quoted the reference in full ("Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body".)

Text also in: L. Vischer (ed.), Reformed Witness Today, pp. 16-18



II A S I A

Theological Declaration

Christian Conference of Asia on Human Rights (1974)

From August 28-30, 1974, the Human Rights Working Group of the Christian Conference of Asia met in Hong Kong. They dealt with problems of the national situations at the time in Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia. As an introduction to concrete appeals with regard to human rights in those countries, the Group formulated some general conclusions in the form of a theological declaration which has a strong confessing character.

We believe that God has created human beings according to his image (Gen 1:23), in unity of body and soul. He made the basic form of humanity as community. In Jesus Christ, God also took part in the history of people by dwelling among them (Jn 1:14). He suffered on the cross and his body was resurrected as a just vindication of the human body (as well as the spirit) against any harm or destruction. In the end, the whole of humanity will participate in the Messianic kingdom, not as bodiless beings, but as bodies. A concrete form of total humanity is spirit, soul, and physical body. Therefore, we affirm that torture or a destructive act against the body, or against the human spirit and psyche, is against God and contrary to Christian belief.

We believe that God has ordained political power, and has entrusted to that power the safeguarding of basic human rights and just order in human society. Today, in human history, political power plays a central role. But the same political power and its structure is one of the primary sources of forces detrimental to human rights and, therefore, human community. Christians cannot be unconditionally obedient to the authority of the state although we are subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake (1 Pet 2:13).

No earthly power can make absolute claims on man's body and life. No such power is able to impose ultimate chaos on God's created order. No such power can require the people's ultimate allegiance to any particular ideology, even in the name of national security. Today, claims of absolute authority by a political power become more dangerous than so-called subversive activities; for such political authority destroys not only physical and institutional order, but the fundamental community as a whole.

We believe that man has the inherent right to witness to the truth. This implies freedom of conscience and freedom of expression, to speak openly about historical reality, whether

political, social or economic. It is the vocation of Christians to tell the truth, for without doing so, there can be no witness to Jesus Christ, who is the supreme Truth. Furthermore, we know that in telling the truth, man shall be liberated (Jn 8:32). The suppression of the freedom of speech and the complete control and manipulation of the mass media are equally as serious as suppression of the freedom of worship and religious expression.

God is the Lord of history, and his Lordship is to vindicate the oppressed, the poor, and the imprisoned. The chief content of God's Lordship in history is in the realization of a just and therefore humane society in which righteousness flows like water and justice like a stream (Am 5:24). As Christians, we must reject the developmentalists' false utopian premises that prosperity will automatically guarantee human rights. We must point out that human rights cannot be sacrificed in the name of development, that flagrant injustices cannot be condoned for the sake of GNP growth. Without justice and realization of human rights, there can be no development.

We affirm God's solidarity with the people in the course of historical transformation for justice and liberation. We also affirm the solidarity of all peoples, whom God has created and redeemed and is guiding in the march toward his kingdom. We also reaffirm the reality and solidarity of all Christians koinonia worldwide. We are people for community, not isolation; we are on the side of the poor and oppressed; and we are on the march for the kingdom, rejoicing with our brothers and sisters who courageously act and suffer for the cause of the humanity that God has created and redeemed. We know that this is a part of the travail of the whole creation. It involves suffering as a struggle. Yet at the same time, we know that this is the road to reach freedom and the unity of all people. Thus we march together with hope and patience (Rom 8:25).

Text in: Christian Conference of Asia News Supplement dd.
15 September 1974

Also in: Human Rights and Christian Responsibility (CCIA Report)
WCC 1974

'Manifest of Korean Christians' (1973)

At the time of Mr Park Chung Hee's Yu-shin Reform (October 1972) which brought oppression and violation of human rights for large parts of Korea's population, many confessional statements resulted from Christian groups and movements. They are often sealed by the martyrdom - imprisonment, torture - of their editors and signatories. One of these is the so-called "Manifest of Korean Christians" from 1973.

Faith in God, Lord of history, in Jesus, Proclaimer of the Kingdom of God, and in the Spirit, Who is mightily at work in the course of history, this is the firm foundation of our words and deeds. We believe that God is finally the Liberator of the oppressed, the weak and the poor. He will judge the evil powers. We believe that Jesus Christ proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God to cast down the evil powers and that he will establish justice and peace for the oppressed, the outcasts and the downtrodden. We also believe that the Spirit not only renews and sanctifies individual human beings but also recreates the cosmos and history.

The following therefore is the confession of our faith as Christians:

1. We believe that we are destined by God the Judge and Lord of history to be representatives of the whole people and to pray for the deliverance of the oppressed and those who suffer wrong.
2. We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to live with the oppressed, the poor and the outcast and to share their lot, just as he did in Judea; as Jesus witnessed to the truth before Pontius Pilate, the representative of the Roman Empire, so we are called today to speak the truth to the rulers.
3. We believe that the Spirit constrains us to play our part not only in the transformation of our own character but also in the radical reform of the structures of power and in the creation of a new society and history. This Spirit is the Spirit of the Kingdom of God who summons us to the struggle for social and political reconstruction.

(German text from EPD Dokumentation No. 38, 1974)

Translated from the German
WCC Language Service

The Creed for To-day

This creed was written by students at Dungapur (India) during a Course of the Indian National Urban Industrial Mission.

- I believe in one world, full of riches meant for everyone to enjoy;
- I believe in one race, the family of mankind, learning how to live together by the hard way of self-sacrifice.
- I believe in one life, exciting and positive; which enjoys all the beauty, integrity and science; uses the discipline of work to enrich society; harmonizes with the life of Jesus, and develops into a total joy.
- I believe in one morality, love, the holiness of sharing the sorrow and joys of others; of bringing together people as true friends; of working to get rid of the root causes of poverty and injustice, ignorance and fear;
- love, the test of all my thoughts and motives;
- love, guiding me; controlling me; assuring me of God's forgiveness; and giving me confidence under his Spirit's control.
- I believe in Jesus, and the Bible's evidence about him; whose life, death and resurrection prove God's lasting love for the world; who combines in himself, life, love, truth, humanity, reality and God; who saves, guides, and unites all people who follow his way.
- I believe in the purpose of God, to unite in Christ everything, spiritual or secular, to bring about constructive revolution in society, individuals and nations, and to establish world government under his fatherly direction.

Text in: The Expository Times 83 (1971/72), p. 877



III A U S T R A L I A

An Affirmation of Purpose and Faith

This affirmation of faith originates from Presbyterian and Methodist congregations in Australia.

We believe that the best way of life is Jesus' way, the way of service, self-sacrifice, joyfulness, brotherly kindness and love.

As Jesus taught us, our purpose is to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, that is, that we and all men may do God's will according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in daily life.

The power on which we depend is faith in God.

The method by which we work is the method of love to God and fellow men.

We believe that, when we have sinned, if we return in repentance to God, He forgives us because He loves us.

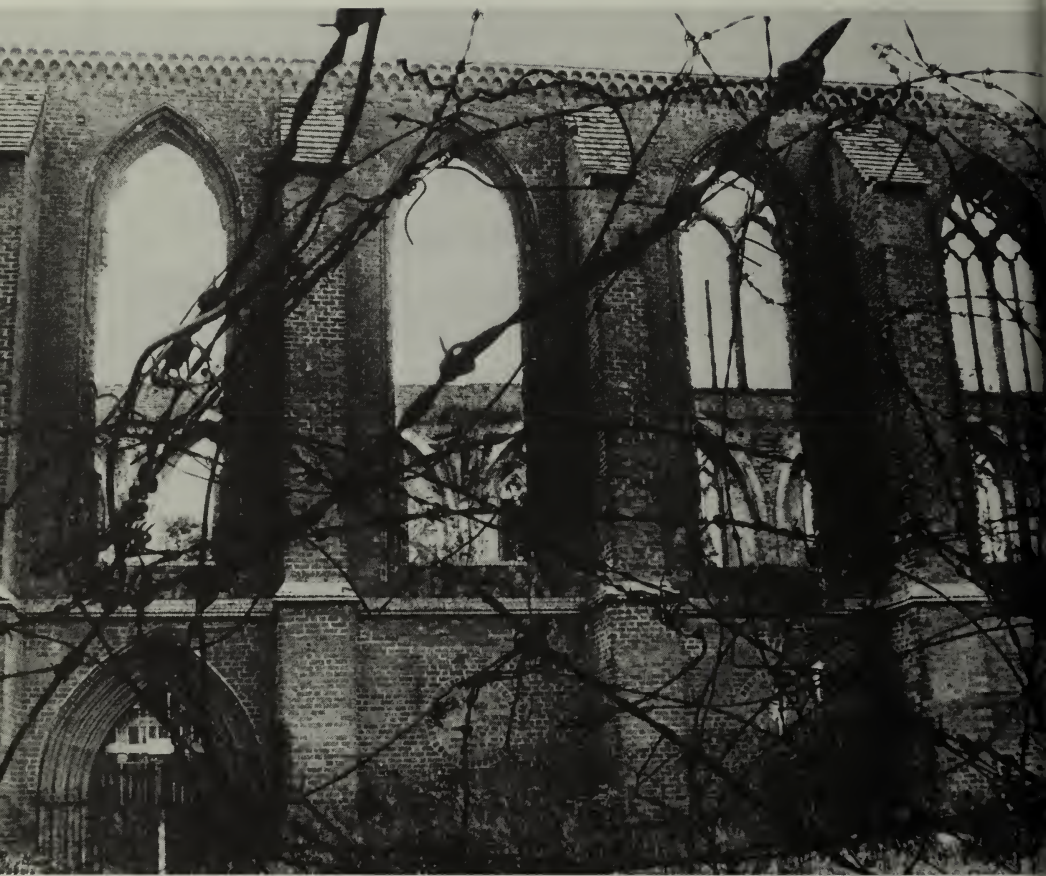
We thank God for His love.

Amen.

For sources see:

Mt 6:12, 33; Mk 8:34, 10:43, 11:22, 12:13-17, 30, 31;
Lk 6:44, 10:25, 37, 11:13, 15:11-24, 22:27; Jn 15:11,
16:13; Ac 9:2, 18:25-26.

Text in: The Expository Times 1972, p. 214



IV EUROPE

Great Is the Mystery of Faith

Statement of Faith of the Roman Catholic Bishops of France (1978)

At their Annual Plenary Assembly in Lourds 1978, the French bishops voted with 114 for and 3 against for the acceptance of a confessional statement called "Il est grand le mystère de la foi".

It is conceived in the form of a doxological catechesis of the fourth Eucharistic Prayer from the renewed Roman Catholic missal. It should serve "those who dedicate themselves to the formation and education of the faith", indicating for our times the essentials of the mystery of faith.

The church believes the way she prays. Each eucharistic celebration is a profession of faith. The rule of prayer is the rule of faith.

This is why we French bishops, wishing to recall to the Catholics of our dioceses the essentials of the mystery of faith, are not presenting any new document but rather a text already known: the eucharistic prayer. We mean to show in this way that faith is not something to be invented. Together with all the faithful, the bishops receive it from tradition, in the midst of the community over which they preside.

We believe all that the church of Christ believes, all that she expresses in the eucharistic prayer.

The words we add to it are not intended to complete this prayer, as if something were lacking, but to assume all its richness; they say only how we receive and understand with our mentality and culture the words of the universal church. Thus we join together in the profound movement and the traditional structure of the faith as they are expressed in the Apostles Creed and the Nicene-Constantinople Creed. The magisterium has continually proposed and explained them through the long course of history down to the profession of faith of Paul VI, 10 years ago.

We have chosen the fourth eucharistic prayer of the missal promulgated after the council by Pope Paul VI. This text, being the more developed, traces the whole plan of man's salvation in Jesus Christ. It commemorates every stage of the covenant, every blessing granted by God to men from the creation until the return of Christ.

The mystery of faith is God himself, as he has made himself known in Jesus Christ, as he entrusts himself to his church, the community of salvation.

Two More Clarifications:

1. We are speaking in the light of faith. We seek to give indications to believers who wish to know and understand as much as possible what they believe, that is, who wish to know better the one in whom they believe.

The mystery of faith is comparable to a stained-glass window. One who sees it from the inside lighted by the sun seizes all its splendor and perceives the figures that it represents. The one who looks at it from the outside, without light, sees only the lead and pieces of glass. If, however, an unbeliever reads our text we hope that he will feel a kind of fervor that will make him feel drawn to Jesus Christ.

2. To speak of faith is also to describe the road by which a man is led step by step to confess that God himself joins him in Christ. The evangelists do not proceed otherwise when they mingle inextricably the revelation of the Father by the Son and the narration of the slow and difficult road the disciples traveled with Jesus.

To retell the faith of the apostles is to set out ourselves. We must advance on this way in order to renew ceaselessly in ourselves and in a community the "yes" by which one speculates on Jesus in a total and definitive manner because we recognize in him the final word of God.

Each morning we set out again in hope in spite of the challenge of death. But we are never alone. In spite of falls, mistakes, misdirections, it is always with fellow men that, in an unexpected way, we receive the Gospel as the good news of the salvation of the world.

Salvation is communion with Jesus and by him and in him, under the movement of the Spirit, with the Father. This communion is total adherence to God himself.

In the act of believing we give up trying to conquer God; we welcome him on the face of the crucified. To welcome him is to open ourselves to the "message of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18), a message from God to man, a gift "received from the Lord" (1 Cor 11:23).

At present, we are not undertaking the whole field of catechesis. Simply, in the service of those who believe and who wish to believe better, in the service of those who dedicate themselves to the formation and education of the faith, we recall the word of salvation, blessing God who has granted us his whole blessing in his Son.

The Eucharistic Prayer

Father in heaven, it is right
that we should give you thanks and glory:
You alone are God, living and true.
Through all eternity you live
in unapproachable light.
Source of life and goodness,
you have created all things,
to fill your creatures with every blessing
and lead all men to the joyful vision of your light.
Countless hosts of angels stand before you
to do your will;
they look upon your splendor
and praise you, night and day.
United with them,
and in the name of every creature under heaven,
we too praise your glory as we sing:
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

I. Who is our God?

The first word that together we must say to God - what else could it be than one of gratitude and wonderment? He gives us existence in order to give himself to us, a joy that nothing could take away from us!

Who then is he, our God? No one has seen him. For centuries the believer hears the same question coming back to him: "Where is your God?" (Ps 42:11)

One would not look for him if he had not already found him. But when one finds him, it is so that he may still seek him.

Many seek him afar, gropingly. Some adore him without knowing him. Now, note that "he is not really far from anyone of us" (cf. Acts 17:27). For he is the first to seek men and comes to meet them. He lets himself be discovered by those who come to him with an upright heart. For a long time he has manifested himself discreetly by words and signs to our fathers in the faith.

He is the God of the living and not of the dead, eternally living himself with an incorruptible and beatific life.

He has spoken to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. Lk 20:37-38). He revealed his sacred name to Moses when he said:

"I am who am" (Ex 3:14) manifesting thus that he exists without restriction, with the strength of a presence which is opposed to the "nothingness" of the false gods.

We adore him as "the blessed and only ruler, the king of kings and Lord of lords who alone has immortality and who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no human being has ever seen or can see, to whom belong honour and everlasting rule" (1 Tim 6:15-16).

We can speak to him since he has spoken to us in Jesus, by whom he has revealed himself to men.

Father

Instructed by Christ, we have the boldness and the simplicity to call him Father. "Father", said Jesus in his prayer, "to them I have revealed your name and I will continue to reveal it so that your love for me may live in them, and I may live in them" (Jn 17:26).

We do not picture his paternity solely on the model of parents on this earth. Through Jesus Christ we know that he is the living one giving life without receiving it himself, first and unique origin of all that exists. He knows us, recognizes us personally, calls us with a love without reserve or recall. We exist by him and for him.

The Only God

He alone is God. He is unique. There is no other god but him. We believe this firmly with all the Jewish and Mohammedan believers, with all men who recognize that God cannot be other than one and unique. Like them, we refuse the idols of yesterday and of today, merchants of illusion, incapable of procuring for us the fullness of life.

Unknowable

God is mystery. Without limit of any kind, he could not be a prisoner of our intelligence: We can neither possess him nor penetrate him, nor enclose him within our formulas. Everything that we may say of him bears the mark of our own limitations. He is light beyond all light, intelligence, love and liberty beyond all our ideas, all our projects - tenderness beyond all our kindnesses.

Revealed by His Son

The mystery of God has not remained for us an undecipherable enigma. What was hidden from the learned and the clever, has been revealed to the merest children (Lk 10:21). "It is God the only Son, ever at the Father's side, who has revealed" the invisible God (Jn 1:18).

In Jesus Christ men receive the favour of penetrating the secret of divine life: God is the Father of an eternal Son who is his living word, ever united to him in the eternal communion of the Holy Spirit. When we respectfully invoke the Father, through

the Son, in the Spirit, we adore the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, blessed Trinity, God living in a perfect unity, a total simplicity.

Love

This marvel of God is revealed to us in Jesus Christ: instead of stupefying us, it invites us to admiration and to praise. For our God discovers himself to us the very loving God, anxious for the salvation of all and of each one. His omnipotence, his liberty, his knowledge, his justice, his truth are unified in this first and last reality which, ever since St. John, the church recognizes, saying simply: "God is love." "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love." (1 Jn 4:8, 16)

Love also designs the law that governs our whole life, according to the word of Jesus: "Love one another, as I have loved you." Thus the secret of the living God is likewise the first and last word of the life of man.

Holiness

The holiness of God is again this same incomparable love which radiates and communicates itself without being diminished by evil; and without God's ceasing to be the Lord of glory who appeared to Isaiah with the infinite majesty of a most high and all powerful king, inaccessible even when he makes himself very near (cf. Is 6:1-5).

To recognize this holiness is to adore the Lord and to fear him. But the fear of the Lord is not terror. On the contrary, "the fear of the Lord is glory and splendor, gladness and a festive crown (Eccl 1:9).

He who fears the Lord will have a happy end; even on the day of his death he will be blessed" (Eccl 1:11).

To recognize this holiness is also to adore, as Jesus has taught us, that the name of the heavenly Father may be hallowed. Through these words we express our desire that the most Holy Father be recognized as God by all men in order that earth like heaven may shine with his glory.

Creator

The one God whom we adore is Father, Son and Spirit: he is not alone. It was not in order to leave his solitude that he created us, as if we were drawn from the need of a divinity for companionship. It was by gratuitous love that we were called into existence; it was not a need that caused him to save us in his own Son, or to unite us to himself in his own Spirit. It was from pure goodness in the generosity of his love for us. He has drawn everything out of nothing. All that we are, all that we have, we continually receive from him.

Father of All

We bless his name because he is the Father of all men without exception, "for his sun rises on the bad and the good, he rains on the just and the unjust" (Mt 5:45). God loves all the living and does not seek the loss of anyone. Consequently we cannot refuse anyone respect, service and love. We profess that every son of man is called to be a son of God: according to his benevolent design, the Father "predestined us through Christ Jesus to be his adopted sons" (Eph 1:5).

All Brothers

Jesus has opened to us the doors of a universal brotherhood. No frontier on earth, no wall erected on our soil goes up to God's heaven. We cannot deny or silence this certitude which is the source of our joy. We can only reject radically every form of slavery or hatred, individual or familial, tribal, social, national or racial, ideological or religious. Our faith does not separate us from anyone, not even from those who would be our enemies or persecutors. However far one may have separated himself from God's ways, he can always find the welcome that the Father of tenderness reserves for all prodigal children (cf. LK 15). Let us be ready to witness to him at all times.

*Father, we acknowledge your greatness:
all your actions show your wisdom and love.
You formed man in your own likeness
and set him over the whole world to serve you, his creator,
and to rule over all creatures.*

II. Creation

Creation. This is the name we love to give to all reality issuing from the will of God, our own and that which surrounds us. Creation: if this term points out a far-distant temporal origin, it signifies much more the actual bond with the Invisible on the part of all existence which constitutes the world in its reality and dynamism. The creature exists, really given to itself: it is not God, nor a part of God. But it does not exist as a child abandoned by its father. "It is he who gives to all life and breath and everything else ... he is not really far from anyone of us. In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:25-28).

Is it not naive or bold to believe that this world is the work of a creator full of goodness? According to the common experience of men, there is no evidence that everything has been disposed "with wisdom and through love". However, without hesitation we affirm his providence, professing our hope for the end of time. This hope will not be deceived, for it has as guarantee the love of our God for this creation whose limits and sufferings he has willed to share in the incarnation of his Son.

Consequently, to speak of the creator is not to enclose God in the past, but to affirm a living relation with him in the present; it is also to look to the future, for the creating act is a call

of love which invites each one and all humanity to live history in response to this call. For God who creates man in an admirable manner and renews him in Jesus Christ in a still more admirable manner, will give him his full measure "of glory and splendour" (cf. Ps 8:6) when the new heavens and the new earth will appear.

Thus, from now on, by affirming our faith in the creator, we offer an answer to the perennial questions of humanity. On this earth we are not alone. We have not just fallen there by chance or by error. We are not worthless. The scientific understanding of this world and its technical transformation leave us in the presence of the most profound mystery. What is the meaning of it all? Where is the light of life? Toward what destiny are we embarked?

We believe that the design of God is to unite all men in his beloved son. "All things were created through him and for him." "In him everything was created, things visible and invisible" (Col 1:17, 16). As Christians, we believe that God the Father has created everything through his Son, the eternal wisdom, the word of life, a light for all mankind.

To Serve the Creator To Rule over Creation

From the Father, through the Son, we receive ourselves as a free gift and a task entrusted to our responsibility. We also receive the world as a great body which is given to us to respect and to construct. Instead of restricting us, faith in the creator is for us an assurance of true liberty.

Indeed, if God is the source and only judge of our liberty, no force on earth has the right to enslave us.

Since creation thus designs a living relation, ceaselessly maintained between the creature and the creator, the meaning and value of our work are singularly enlightened. Human activity both individual and collective, by which all through the centuries men have endeavoured to improve their condition in life, corresponds to the design of God.

Man and woman, created in the image of God, have indeed received the commission to fructify the earth and all that it contains, and to organize - according to justice, right and love - family, social and political relations. In recognizing God as the creator of everything, man is called to submit to him his own being as well as the universe, in order that the very name of God may be glorified by all the earth.

God is the master of time and history. It is he who makes the work of our hands and the production of our minds profitable. Through the love he gives us, he allows us to ripen in time the fruits of eternity. In doing good to creation, man benefits himself.

In spite of the shock of evil, of the scandal of suffering and of death, we refuse to turn away from God. Throughout all our

trials, we maintain in faith that God is right to send us life, to send us his Son to save the world, to spread his Spirit of holiness and of communion. Placed in this world, we find an exalted vocation there, to live together as children united to the Son, called to make of the whole creation a place of fraternal life.

Invisible Creatures

As for the invisible realities which surround the world given to us for our experience, we profess in faith that they do not exist except as created by God, without whom nothing could exist. In the liturgy our hymns of praise unite with the hymn of the servants of God who "acclaim him day and night in his temple" (Rev 7:15). They are "fellow servants for your brothers the prophets and those who heed the message of this book" (Rev 22:9). They witness to the infinite variety of creation. Their mission as angels is that of messengers, appointed to make God's message personal and to present our prayers to God (cf. Rev 8:3-5).

No evil power can cause the universal lordship of Christ to fail definitely. The scriptures speak to us of spiritual creatures whose revolt weighs heavily on the human species: in that way they exhort us to carry on in faith the combat of Christ, and they show us how communion with the truth and love of the Lord frees us from fear before these demons who are living lies, enemies of all true life.

*Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship
you did not abandon him to the power of death,
but helped all men to seek and find you.
Again and again you offered a covenant to man,
and through the prophets taught him to hope for salvation.*

III. Man, An Enigma to Himself

"What is man, that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man, that you should care for him?" (Ps 8:5) Thus every man questions himself. He tries to understand the meaning of his life and of every human adventure. The same piercing questions keep coming back to him.

Why do we encounter this mass of suffering when we thirst for happiness and search for beauty? Why is the creator so little visible in his creation, to the point that men who wish to meet him must seek him gropingly? Why does innocence appear so rare, so fragile to our darkened hearts? (cf. Rom 1:21)

Why does our liberty so poorly control itself? Could not each human group, each society and all humanity, yes, and each individual also, apply to itself what the apostle Paul wrote: "I cannot even understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do, but what I hate ... the desire to do right is there, but not the power. What happens is that I do not the good I will

to do, but the evil I do not intend. What a wretched man I am! Who can free me from this body?" (Rom 7:15ff). Each one experiences an interior division humanly insurmountable: all human history offers the scandalous and painful spectacle of conflict and violence. The conscience of man is wounded, tormented by a need of inaccessible fulfillment and unity: the world seems to be irremediably broken. "The whole world is under the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19).

From this one cannot escape further interrogations: Why this domination of sin over man? Why this experience of evil under its double form, seductive and repulsive?

Original Sin

In the light of revelation, we answer: these contradictions, weaknesses, this powerlessness, are the sign that man can never save himself alone. He can only turn to God and await salvation from him.

Our natural condition no longer manifests in itself friendship with God and participation in his life. For from the very beginning of humanity, sin entered the world, affecting every man and it has proliferated.

Sin is this turning away by which man offends his Lord and turns his back on him, thus losing his friendship in order to seek elsewhere the fullness of joy which alone his creator can offer him. To turn away from the source of life is to give oneself over to the power of death. To claim to do without God in order to enjoy total autonomy is to lock oneself up in self-sufficiency.

Covenant

But "despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it" (Rom 5:20). In the same history of mankind we find at one and the same time the effects of evil - incalculable repercussions of the refusal to love, traditions and structures of scorn, indifference and domination - and also the signs of the tenacity of a God who persists obstinately in sending back the calls, in taking the initiative of mercy. God does not wish to leave man a prisoner of hatred and deceit. He does not abandon him to distress and evil. He comes on ahead to meet man. He speaks to him. He multiplies invitations to salvation.

Less than 4,000 years ago, he called Abraham and made him the father of believers and a source of blessings for all races.

Contracting an alliance with his family to make it a great nation, he did not hesitate to make use of the roads of human history. But when he makes his own the destiny of a single people, he does not diminish the others. He thinks of the salvation of all people. He already desires to assemble all one day in the unity of his kingdom.

With Israel

At Sinai he solemnly renewed his covenant with the tribes of Israel whom he sent out of Egypt. He gave them a land, a law, a temple, priests and psalms. In David he chose a king "after his own heart" from whom the Messiah was to descend.

To the people he sent wise men and saints. Through the voices of the prophets he showed that he would have for his people the love of a fiancé, even when the misconduct of his beloved brought him the humiliation of a rejected lover. She would flaunt his love. He would still forgive her.

*Yet he, being merciful, forgave their sin
and destroyed them not;
Often he turned back his anger
and let none of his wrath be roused.
He remembered that they were flesh,
a passing breath that returns not.*

*How often they rebelled against him in the desert
and grieved him in the wilderness!
Again and again they tempted God
and provoked the Holy One of Israel.
They remembered not his hand nor the day
he delivered them from the foe. (Ps 78:38-42)*

Thus God prepared for himself a people who refused idols and remained faithful to him alone. All through terrible trials - exile, foreign occupation - the hope that was too strong for his stiff-necked people dwelt in the hearts of the poor. The humble remnant who did not doubt that it would see the consolation of Israel, such as the old Simeon and such as the humble servant whom all ages would call blessed because the mighty one was going to do great things in her and for her. "And the name of the virgin was Mary."

*Father, you so love the world that in the fulness of time
you sent your only Son to be our saviour.
He was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit,
and born of the Virgin Mary,
a man like us in all things but sin.
To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation,
to prisoners, freedom, and to those in sorrow, joy.*

IV. Jesus

"When the designated time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4).

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born at Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary, Jesus was brought up at Nazareth in the home of Mary and Joseph, her spouse. There he received, like his contemporaries, a distinct language, culture and environment. He was instructed in the traditions of the people to whom he belonged. Later on,

his instruction would attest to a profound familiarity with the biblical writings, and especially a still deeper intimacy with God who had spoken through the prophets. When he attained manhood he received the baptism of John and withdrew into the desert of Judea.

"After John's arrest, Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God" (Mk 1:14). He showed his preference for the sick, the unfortunate ones tormented by the demons, for the poor, the little ones, the disinherited, the unloved, the sinners. "He went about, doing good" (Acts 10:38).

He assembled around him a group of disciples among whom "he named twelve as his companions whom he would send to preach the good news" (Mk 3:14).

He was like us in everything except sin. He showed himself profoundly human, experiencing hunger and thirst, fatigue, sorrow, astonishment and admiration, indignation and anger, tenderness and pity. He knew our joys and our tears.

His Message

The four Gospels, through the witness of the faith of their authors, make known to us his message: God intervenes to establish his reign which is very near. One must be ready, watch and be converted in his heart to receive the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Jesus calls certain ones whom he chooses specially to abandon everything and follow him, but he invites everyone to lose his life like him in order to find it in him. The essential is to love: the love of the Lord God, our Father, and the love of the neighbour, our brother, are distinct but inseparable. The commandment to love is not an arbitrary exigency - it is good news for all of us. The Father loves us first. And Jesus teaches through his behaviour, the way and the dimensions of love.

Who Is He?

By his acts and his words, by exceptional signs or miracles - which were always marks of goodness in the service of the cure of "the whole man" (cf. Jn 7:23) - Jesus obliged the people to question themselves. Who, then, was he who said he was greater than Solomon or Jonah, before Abraham, and who spoke of his body as of the new temple?

The mission that he was fulfilling manifested in Jesus the awareness of a unique and exceptional relationship with God whom he called familiarly Abba, Father, acting thus as only "Son". With singular authority he forgave sins, and declared himself to be the only door by which all were to pass in order to accede to eternal life.

After his passion, his death and resurrection in the holy city of Jerusalem, the disciples found themselves confronted again

by the question of the former days. "You, who do you say that I am?" Remembering the promise of Jesus, they allowed the Holy Spirit to guide them toward the whole truth. Jesus raised in glory had accomplished the hopes of Israel. He was the Lord of all time.

They saw in his death, announced and already offered as a sacrifice at the time of the Last Supper, the source of salvation for all humanity. They discovered in his acts and his teachings the fundamental law of a new life.

The Mystery of the Son of Man

Penetrating still further into the understanding of his mystery, the apostolic community, enlightened by the Spirit of Pentecost, affirmed its faith in repeating the first proclamation of Peter. "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16), that of the centurion at the foot of the cross: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39), and that of Thomas after the resurrection: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

Professing the constant faith of the whole church, we recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the word made flesh. True God, perfectly God, he is but one God with the Father. He is the eternal Son "by whom the Father created the world" (Heb 1:2). In him, the word of God has become one of us: a human being.

The Incarnation

His life in Palestine has nothing in common with the appearances of gods which pagan mythologies speak. For us men and for our salvation, he became man of flesh and blood, heart and spirit. This is the mystery of the incarnation.

One could not simply say that he is the man nearest to God, the greatest of the saints, the most powerful of the prophets. He is not a divinized man, but God made man.

He did not commence to be the Son by being born of the Virgin Mary, nor at the moment of his baptism by John, nor when he rose from the dead. He is not the Son of God in this sense that he would have become it only in the spirit or in the action of the people who believed in him.

All that he lived in his earthly life, we believe that he lived it as Son of God and not to merit becoming it. This is why he could say before his death, "whoever sees me, sees the Father" (Jn 14:9). "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30).

Fully at home from all eternity in the bosom of his Father, he is fully at home among men, but he is among us as one who came from elsewhere, and who will come in glory at the end of time.

*In fulfilment of your will
he gave himself up to death;
but by rising from the dead,
he destroyed death and restored life.*

The Obedience of the Son

Christ declared that he received all from his Father: his existence, his mission, his glory, the words he uttered, the works he accomplished.

Living in perfect communion with him, Jesus showed himself to be at the same time his well-beloved Son and his faithful and totally obedient servant. In the constancy of this will, he could say no to every temptation. He responded to the solicitations of his contemporaries with a forceful refusal. He did not wish to be king of this world, nor a temporal messiah, nor a political liberator, nor a zealot, nor a revolutionary, nor a jurist, nor a magician. Thus with Jesus, light shone on earth, but the darkness did not receive it. His contemporaries refused to come to the light "lest their deeds should be exposed" (Jn 3:20).

Even Unto Death

Jesus was betrayed by a friend, arrested by a troop of soldiers, questioned by the Jewish leaders, judged worthy of death for having blasphemed in claiming to be the messiah, the Son of God. Pontius Pilate condemned him as an agitator who had disturbed the public order by calling himself the king of the Jews. Scourged and crucified, he died on the cross and was put in a tomb.

Redemption

Calling to mind these facts, the church in her faith that rests on the word of Christ, recognized in them the sign of the greatest love. Jesus was not the plaything of events. People did not manipulate him against his will. No one took his life away from him. He gave it. His life, offered through love, did not end in a cruel failure. It was given to the Father once for all as the unique and definitive sacrifice of reconciliation. His death, when all was accomplished, opened the era of pardon. "By his stripes we were healed" (Is 53:5).

Is each of us responsible in part for his death? Yes, because "he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins" (Is 53:5). But the most important fact is that we can say with St. Paul, "he loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). We believe that pardon for sins is the blessed consequence of the love of Christ, who died freely for the salvation of multitudes and rose again for their justification (Rom 4:25). This is what the church believes when she professes the mystery of redemption.

The Redemption

"Jesus the Nazarean was a man God sent to you ... You even made use of pagans to crucify and kill him. God freed him from death's bitter pangs, however ... This is the Jesus God has raised up, and we are his witnesses ... You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 38).

Such was the testimony of the apostle Peter on Pentecost morning. The whole apostolic community acknowledged this and in its turn proclaimed the happy news.

Such was the central affirmation, essential to the Christian faith. In our turn, we affirm it. The risen Lord is indeed Jesus of Nazareth whom they had known before his condemnation by Pilate and his death on the wood of the cross. He was raised from the dead; he was exalted to the right hand of the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit. Easter, Ascension and Pentecost mark the three moments of his unique glorification. Thus he has obtained the primacy in all things. He was the principle of all that subsists. He became the first-born from among the dead, for it has pleased God that in him all his fullness should dwell (cf. Col 1:18-19).

Such is the core of the apostolic message, the luminous source of all the tradition of the church, this living memory by which the Spirit actualizes the presence of the risen Christ and the words of his Gospel. "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures ... He was buried, and in accordance with the scriptures, rose on the third day ... He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. After that he was seen by 500 brothers at once" (1 Cor 15:3-6).

The Father, therefore, has not willed that the history of the covenant would end in the murder of his Son. In raising Christ, who was lying in the bonds of death, bringing him near him in glory, the Father made an opening in our closed world for a love that is stronger than death. Since then, united to the only Son, we have free access to the world of God. There we find for all time our true home and our true city.

With Christ glorified, raised to the right hand of the Father, one of us - a man like ourselves - has entered as the firstborn of a multitude of brethren into the paradise of God wherein he is indestructibly linked to the world of men. Christ's resurrection is promise of our own. It frees us from the fear of death (cf. Heb 2:15). For us, death no longer will have the final word.

"If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too. Indeed, we should then be exposed as false witnesses of God, for we have borne witness before him that he raised up Christ. But he certainly did not raise him up if the dead are not raised. Why? Because if the dead are not raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins and those who have fallen asleep in Christ are the deadest of the dead. If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men. But as it is, Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Cor 15:13-20).

*That we might no longer live for ourselves
but for him
he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father,*

*as his first gift to those who believe,
to complete his work on earth
and bring us the fullness of grace.*

*Father, may this Holy Spirit sanctify these offerings.
Let them become the body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord
as we celebrate the great mystery
which he left us as an everlasting covenant.*

V. The Spirit of Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the promise of Christ. It was expedient that Jesus be taken away from the sight of his disciples (cf. Jn 16:7) in order that they could receive the new Paraclete, the advocate, consoler and witness.

Previously Jesus had walked with his disciples, among them, at their side. Henceforth, by the action of the Holy Spirit, he will be in them, intimately present to each one, universally present to all in his church to the end of time.

The Work of the Spirit in the Church

The Spirit of Pentecost was at work in the apostolic church. He was at work among the Jews and among the pagans in order to guide them to the church of Jesus. Each page of the Acts of the Apostles bears witness to this. The Spirit made the apostles speak and act. He sustained them in trials and persecutions. He communicated his gifts by the imposition of the hands of the apostles. He urged Peter and Paul to go to the pagans. He enlightened those making important deliberations and joined the apostles in making the decision that concluded the first Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:28).

From then on, he will never cease assisting the church of Christ, for Jesus is faithful to his promises. He will never cease acting in the heart of every man in order to open him to faith in Christ and to bring him into his kingdom.

We believe in the Spirit that gives life. By him we are given imperishable life and love stronger than death. Better still: It is God himself who gives himself to us, he who is life and source of life and love "poured forth into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

Spirit of Christ, he is one God, one Lord with the Father and the Son in the Trinity. He is God, God who gives himself, God within us to make us the temples of his glory. He gathers together the baptized to make of them a holy nation, a royal priesthood. He brings us the remission of sins and the strength of God. He distributes to each one gifts and charisms with a view to the common good (cf. 1 Cor 12).

He is a devouring fire, wind, breath, living water, overflowing torrent; invisible, unforeseeable, intangible, incalculable.

"The wind blows where it will. You hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" (Jn 3:8). He gives us the grace to believe in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 2:8). "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

Signs of the Spirit

There where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor 3:17). "Since we live by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's lead" (Gal 5:25). We shall recognize the fruits of his presence in us and around us by these signs that display its fecundity. "Love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, chastity" (Gal 5:22).

The life that we lead under the impulse of the Spirit is already a foretaste and beginning of life eternal. "We know that we have passed from death to life" (I Jn 3:14). The Spirit maintains in us the eagerness of love and the patience of hope.

The Action of the Spirit in the World

But the assurance of being called to a life beyond death is not an invitation to become disinterested in the world and its inhabitants. On the contrary, we affirm our conviction: by the Holy Spirit, Christ's work continues in history. Jesus is not a phenomenon of the past nor a dream of the future but a light for the man of today. Thanks to the Spirit, Christ's words recorded in the New Testament are not a dead letter, but remain "spirit and life" (Jn 6:63) for the believer.

Given to the church, the Spirit is not a prisoner of her visible frontiers. He does not desert the hearts of men. He asks that they have the liberty that comes from freeing themselves from their egoism in order to open themselves up to the guidance of Christ who leads to the Father.

To Discern the Action of the Spirit

The action of the Spirit in the world does not fall under the senses. In faith we affirm his intervention that we strive to discover through certain signs: for example, the search for truth, obedience to an upright conscience, respect for life, resistance to all covetousness and wickedness, the effort made by men to recognize the equal dignity of all, the same right for all to receive their share of the goods of the earth in justice, the refusal of violence and deceit.

We can recognize the work of the Spirit when individuals and peoples refuse aggression, domination, slavery, contempt. The Spirit is at work when people turn to God and discover in him a Father who loves them and calls them to life.

In Christ's Church the action of this Spirit is received, recognized, celebrated and also discerned. The inspirations that seem to come from him must indeed be verified by their fidelity to the holy scriptures and to the tradition lived today in the church under the direction of its pastors. But the Spirit is

received in truth only when he turns our routines upside down, inflames our lives and leads us to take more courageously the part of man and the Gospel.

In every sacramental celebration, we invoke the Holy Spirit in order that he may make efficacious for us the word of God and bring about our meeting with Christ.

Very especially we invoke him in the eucharistic celebration at the moment of the consecration of the bread and wine, that he may "sanctify" our offerings and unite the communicants into a single body.

For, in the gift of God who saves us, we recognize without separating or confusing them, but in distinguishing them in order to unite them, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:13).

*He always loved those
who were his own in the world.
When the time came for him
to be glorified by you, his heavenly Father,
he showed the depth of his love.
While they were at supper,
he took bread, said the blessing,
broke the bread
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take this, all of you, and eat it:
this is my body which will be given up for you.
In the same way, he took the cup,
filled with wine.
He gave you thanks, and giving the
cup to his disciples, said:
Take this, all of you, and drink from it:
this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed for you and for all men
so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me.*

*Father, we now celebrate
this memorial of our redemption.
We recall Christ's death,
his descent among the dead,
his resurrection, and his ascension
to your right hand:
and, looking forward to his coming in glory,
we offer you his body and blood,
the acceptable sacrifice
which brings salvation to the whole world.*

VI. The Eucharist

"Do this in memory of me." The church faithfully obeys the desire and command of Christ when she assembles to celebrate the eucharist. She recalls then the blessings and the benefits of the covenant of which the bread is the symbol and the summary.

Gift of God, fruit of the earth and of the work of human hands, it recalls the initial blessing inscribed in the heart of the creation that man is called to develop in order that bear its fruit. "Bread of the marvels of our God," it recalls the manna in the desert and the food of Elijah on his journey to Horeb. It evokes the banquet of wisdom where man learns to nourish himself on the word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

As the living bread of the risen Christ, it brings to mind the Lord's teaching: to believe is to work for the imperishable food of eternal life; obedience to the will of the Father is the food of Christ and that of his disciples. The eucharistic bread has a savor of eternity, a foretaste of the hidden manna promised by the Apocalypse as the reward of those who will remain faithful in the last trials. It is the bread of the Last Supper that Jesus took in his most holy hands while saying to his disciples: "Take and eat, this is my body." Is not "the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16)

The Paschal Sacrifice

Assembled for this liturgical repast, we come for something other than a friendly meeting or a ritual ceremony; for we believe, in joy and thankfulness, that Christ's paschal sacrifice is rendered present and real, contemporary with our today. It is given to the church that she may offer it each day as her own sacrifice, from one end of the world to the other. We celebrate brotherhood, but first of all, the presence of him who has made us his brethren. We celebrate life, but first of all, him whose death and resurrection renews our life. In faith, we come to the eucharist in order to meet the risen Christ who has made a rendezvous with us at this table.

The Real Presence

By the efficacy of the word of God, by the vivifying power of the Holy Spirit, the reality, lastingly present under the sign of bread and wine, is the body of Christ given up for us and his blood shed for our sins. In the memorial of his death and resurrection, Christ is there, really living and working, even though he remains invisible to our eyes. The bread and wine are changed to become the body and blood of Christ and we, who have come with our modest offerings, are in turn transformed. The bread we eat, because it is the body of the Son of Man, assimilates us to him. He divinizes us and thus makes us "living offerings" to the glory of the Father. At the same time we are united one to another for, "we are one body, we who all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17).

The Minister of the Eucharist

To convene his church and have her hear his word, to animate and direct her in her mission, to preside over the eucharistic celebration in memory of him, Christ by his Spirit acting in his church, chooses still today servants who are invested with the apostolic ministry.

The eucharistic assembly is presided over by the bishop or a priest who has received the imposition of hands by a bishop. The necessary presence of an ordained minister signifies that it is Christ, unique pastor of his church, who invisibly presides over the repast in which he offers himself as food. It is not the assembly that gives itself to Christ; it is the Lord Jesus himself who by his minister makes himself present to it.

Bishop or priest, the minister acting in the name of Christ testifies to the union of communities with one another in the bosom of the universal church. Taking part in the eucharist, each baptized person shares in the life of the same Lord, and thus becomes by faith the contemporary of the Christians of all ages and continents. The minister also sends the community forth to an apostolic mission; the church cannot be enclosed within itself. Lay persons and pastors with their own special responsibilities have the missionary vocation to announce the word of life where it has not yet been heard or to create new communities.

The Eucharist, the Sacrament of Unity

The sacrament of unity, the eucharist calls upon the communities that celebrate the pascha of Christ to overcome their divisions. The church must give men the testimony of unity in faith and efficacy in service. The common struggle against deceit, violence, oppression, hatred is part of evangelical testimony.

To discern the body of Christ, as St. Paul begs the Christians of Corinth to do, is not only to adore the body and blood present under the appearances of bread and wine, it is also to recognize the Christ who works, suffers, hopes, resists, loves and prays in each of the members of his mystical body.

To Work With Christ for the Salvation of the World

To come to the eucharistic celebration and to receive there the body and blood of the saviour, commits us to make the redemptive work of Christ our own. This gift that Christ makes of himself, and of us whom he takes with him is ratified by us in the great amen of our adherence. Our amen to Christ's pascha affirms that we are ready to propagate in the world and in history the movement of light, love and service in which Christ has taken the initiative. We bring our voice to the amen of humanity that is united to the amen of Christ in whom there was not yes and no, but the total yes of unreserved adherence (cf. 2 Cor 1:19).

Together we learn to say amen to the will of the Father in order that the gathering, begun around the altar, may be enlarged even to a reconciliation among all the children of God beyond the separations of race, culture, class and religion.

Assembled in the church, we celebrate the salvation of the world, proclaiming "the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26) into the glory of his kingdom.

The Sacraments

Radiating from the eucharist, their center and their summit, the Christian sacraments manifest in the church the multiple riches of the unique mystery: "Christ in you, your hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

They are the personal actions of Christ, the word made flesh. In their own way they prolong among us in the communities in the church the acts formerly accomplished by Jesus when he cured, pardoned, gave hope and life. Each time that a sacrament is celebrated, it is Christ himself who sends his Spirit to mark our lives with the imprint of his grace. This initiative of the Lord comes first; the faithful act in accepting in faith, in letting themselves be "led" by the Spirit (Rom 8:14). The sacraments are thus the most powerful encounters of Christ with his disciples; they mark for each one the principal stages of our personal history.

The sacraments promote not only the good of individuals. They are the actions by which Christ maintains and develops the life of his church in her different communities. In sacramental celebrations the church uncovers her real face in order to manifest it to the world. She responds to her mission and receives the strength to accomplish it. She remembers that she was born of the intervention of God and remains in total dependence on her saviour. She puts to work the great commandment of love; no sacramental celebration leaves man isolated before his God. The action of the sacrament always supposes a fraternal meeting in charity. Each time Christ exhorts us to seek first the kingdom and its perfection, inspiring us with the beatitudes he has bequeathed to us.

*Lord, look upon this sacrifice
which you have given to your church;
and by your Holy Spirit, gather all
who share this bread and wine
into the one body of Christ,
a living sacrifice of praise.*

*Lord, remember those for whom we offer this sacrifice,
especially our pope, our bishop,
and bishops and clergy everywhere.
Remember those who take part in this offering,
those here present and all your people,
and all who seek you with a sincere heart.*

VII. The Church

In the eucharistic assembly, the church shows herself as she is: a part of humanity that welcomes Christ the saviour and gives thanks: an assembly of sons who are open to the Spirit and as brothers are united in the same confession of faith; the people of God sent into the world to bring it the salt and the light of Christ, to live in the city of men, deeply rooted in the vocation of all mankind.

One

The church is one. There is "but one body and one Spirit just as there is one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all and is in all" (Eph 4:6). Of this church Jesus Christ is the one head, the unique and invisible pastor. On earth she is a visible centre of communion in the church of Rome in the person of its bishop, the successor of Peter, in order to preside over ecclesial charity. As pastor of the universal church, visible head of the church, he is called by Christ to confirm his brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22:23).

His magisterium is infallible when he means to commit himself solemnly in the name of Christ for the whole church. The bishops exercise their apostolic charge in communion with him. "If the bishop of Rome is called in question, if his chair is shaken, it is not one bishop that is shaken, but the whole episcopate that totters" (St. Avitus, bishop of Vienne in Gaul in the sixth century).

Holy

The church is holy; holy with the holiness of Christ whose body and spouse she is. It is not that she is composed of persons definitely freed from sin and perfect. She gathers together sinners to teach them to receive the mercy of the saviour and to put at their disposal the abundance of grace and holiness, the inexhaustible source of which the Holy Spirit maintains in it.

Catholic

The church is catholic, first of all because she is open to all, welcoming all peoples, cultures and languages, for Christ breaks down the barriers raised by sin and particularism. She is catholic, in the second place, because she is the revelation and communication of the entire gift of God.

Thus she is the body of Christ from whom she receives her whole mission as a heritage. She is sent to all peoples; she must bring them the Lord's entire message, not imposing it on them in a totalitarian way, but appealing to their spiritual liberty and to the grace of the Lord within them.

The fullness of the mystery of grace resides also in each particular church that lives in peace and in communion with the

pope, with the churches of the entire world and their bishops. She is catholic since her essential vocation obliges her to go outside her frontiers: as the sacrament of the salvation of the world, she cannot announce salvation only for herself. To radiate in that way, she must respect the structure that Christ has given her for the service of her mission. It would then be a deviation from this to imagine she would radiate more radically getting rid of all institutions - sacraments, ordained ministers, dogmas, legislation and all that makes her, according to the will of Christ, a church for mankind.

Ecumenical Fellowship

Our church respects the gifts of God given to other churches and Christian communities. She recognizes in these communities the blessings on which the whole church is built: holy scripture, the life of grace, faith, hope and charity, other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit and other visible elements. The separations that wound the body of Christ are a hindrance to expressing in all its aspects the fullness of catholicity in the reality of life. That is why the restoration of Christian unity is our ardent wish ceaselessly present in our prayer, since the same baptism, if it is conferred according to the institution of the Lord, incorporates everyone in the same Christ, establishing among those regenerated by him a sacramental bond of unity.

Apostolic

She is apostolic since the faith of the apostles is the unshakable rock of her foundation. She is apostolic because she is sent in mission to men. She is charged with announcing in the language of each one the marvels of God, just as the apostles on the day of Pentecost announced them to the representatives of the peoples gathered in Jerusalem. From apostles to apostles, from bishops to bishops, the message traveled through history and the world of men. She would cease to be apostolic, she would cease to be catholic, if she gave up being missionary.

Professing without shame our adherence to this church established by Jesus Christ, we are not ignorant of the fact that the face she daily presents to the world does not always allow the radiance of grace to appear.

Often the church of our hope is not the church of our experience. How many times has she not been the occasion of disenchantment? She scandalizes freethinkers, disappoints the weak; she remains the refuge of hearts that seek the holiness of God.

The Church of Saints

Such as she is, we love her because she is the church of Christ and the church of saints. We are attached to her history because it is the history of holiness often hidden in the humility of daily life. Faith knows how to discover God who is reborn, always new, in the hearts of saints. The church has an assured future because Jesus Christ himself is her future; because the holiness of God cannot cease giving itself, and the world will always have a need for holiness; because God cannot fail in his

will to establish his kingdom among men. She cannot disappear from history because her future is, from the first, rooted outside history. Her future is already the deep secret of her present, for it is the future and the love that "is the greatest" and that does not pass away (1 Cor 13:13).

It would be senseless to adhere to Christ while rejecting the church or despising her. Every pretence of seeking elsewhere than in the church a true Gospel, a more living Christ, a purer grace, is doomed beforehand to illusion and failure. Can one separate a body from its head or a bride from her bridegroom?

During the Time of Pilgrimage

A sign of God among men, the church is the tent of a people on a journey. The Gospel that it must bring to the world ceaselessly calls her to rid herself of encumbering riches. We know her now in her provisory state, that of a pilgrimage, stages between Pentecost and Christ's return. This historic form is destined to disappear, when the fullness of the reality she announces will appear. And in the midst of her trials she does not fear. Heaven and earth can pass away but the word of God that dwells in her and keeps her standing will exist eternally.

*Remember those who have died
in the peace of Christ
and all the dead whose faith is known to you alone.*

*Father, in your mercy grant also to us, your children,
to enter into our heavenly inheritance
in the company of the Virgin Mary,
the Mother of God,
and your apostles and saints.
Then, in your kingdom,
freed from the corruption of sin and death,
we shall sing your glory
with every creature through Christ our Lord,
through whom you give us
everything that is good.*

*Through him,
with him,
in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit;
all glory and honour is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

VIII. Our Expectation

A people of believers, we walk as if we saw the invisible (cf. Heb 11:27). We are going toward the heavenly Jerusalem, the wonderful city of which God himself is the architect and builder, an unshakeable kingdom, a splendour shining with the very glory

of God. We await the return of Christ, we await the time when he will come to take us with him, according to his promise that where he, the master, is, there also will be his servants (cf. Jn 12:26).

We await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. When the glory is revealed to us, we shall understand that the sufferings of this life cannot be compared with what awaits us. The entire creation will no longer know suffering and sorrow. We shall see God as he is, we shall know him as we are known by him. God will be all in all; there will be one Christ in his fullness, in the dimension of redeemed humanity, loving with a perfect love in billions of hearts beating with the same rhythm.

The Called and the Chosen

We hope for the salvation of everyone. But we know that God cannot force one to love him when the latter refuses him definitely. A radical refusal of love, leading to inexpressible and endless sadness, remains possible. Christ, as gentle and humble of heart as he was, evoked tears and grinding of teeth and a fire that is never quenched. These images cannot be erased from his message. They evoke the terrible reality of an absolute rupture, that of hell. They warn us of the seriousness of our choices; they remind us that we are fallible creatures exposed to temptation. It is Christ who judges, it is Christ who saves.

Only his grace can purify us now, at death and even beyond death, if in this life we accept at least not to be closed to his mercy. Having died in the Lord, the deceased are in his hands, and there at the end of their journey, they know his joy and his life, now mysterious to us. The Lord perfects his work and marks, with the definitive imprint of his beauty, the work of his hands.

The Communion of Saints

Because living or dead, all men are known to God, gathered in the eternal present of his love, we have an intimation that there is among men a solidarity stronger than death. The communion of saints permits those who have loved one another in Christ on earth, even without recognizing it, to meet one another again mysteriously, beyond the abyss of death, reunited in the heart of God by the mediation of Christ. Always living, he ceaselessly intercedes in our favour. We also intercede with him.

The church honours as saints those who have responded in an exemplary fashion to their vocation as baptized persons: by their radiating charity, they enlighten and sustain those who approach them and those who have recourse to their intercession. Sanctity does not require an uncommon destiny, nor extraordinary human qualities, nor exceptional events, but essentially the love of God and of others. In the lives of the saints there shines the grace of the entire church that Jesus wished to be

"without spot or wrinkle or defilement, but holy and immaculate".

Among the saints, the first place belongs to Mary, the mother of God, ever virgin. Immaculate from her origin, she said "yes" in the name of the whole human race. In her fiat, the Spirit was at work with all the perfection of holiness that he will display in the church of all ages. Already raised in glory near her son by her assumption, she remains in glory near each one of us, and she still belongs to the human family, while she prays for us maternally, now and at the hour of our death.

The Realization Surpasses the Promise

Our hope is firm. We do not know how God will bring about the new heavens and the new earth when we shall be "sons of the resurrection" (cf. Lk 20:36). But we are instructed by the history of the covenants that God has multiplied with us. When God fulfills his promises, we marvel at his generosity. Through fidelity he grants all he has promised. Through grace he gives much more.

Thus in the incarnation of his Son, the world awaited justice and peace, Israel awaited a messiah, a king, a priest, a prophet... When the well-beloved Son appeared, he was all that at the same time and infinitely more. It was necessary for him to come that we might discover how he fulfilled the promise and went very far beyond it. Thus when we shall awaken in the light of the resurrection, we shall feel that our expectation has been fulfilled; and much beyond that, we shall be entranced in discovering that the gift of God is infinitely more precious than all that we would have dared to hope for or dared to ask from him.

Life at Its Very Source

God himself will be our joy. In his inaccessible light, he will give us access to the view of his glory. Then we shall drink life at its very source, in the Trinity, with the Father, by the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

We shall hear for the last time the familiar call: "Happy are those who are invited to the table of the Lord!" In jubilation, we shall know that the hour of the banquet has sounded. We shall see the heavenly Jerusalem, beautiful as a bride, descending from heaven, and all the guests hastening from the four corners of the horizon. We shall recognize without difficulty ourselves among the poor, the disabled, the blind, the lame. All hurrying to enter the eternal church, swept toward their Lord with the ardour of an impetuous love, rushing like a torrent that dashes down the slopes of the mountain of God.

English text in: Origins 9 (1980) no 30, pp. 477-489

Liturgical Creeds from the French Reformed Service Book

The French Reformed Church (l'Eglise Réformée de France) has a tradition of incorporating various credal formulas in its Service book. A free choice is allowed on several occasions (like the Sunday Liturgy, the Ordination Service, etc.). It has adopted several new Orders of Service for the Sunday Liturgy. Part of the liturgical forms are officially approved and accepted creeds in different styles, for free use in the liturgy.

Order of Worship 6

Affirmation of Faith

- I believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
who became human,
so that we might have forgiveness, joy and salvation.
- I believe that he died and rose again
to give us victory over death
and assure us of our resurrection.
- I believe that,
as he came in weakness and humility,
so he will come again in power and glory.
- By him I believe in God our Father,
who takes us for his children
and loves us as he loves Jesus Christ.
- I believe in the Holy Spirit,
who dwells in our spirit,
and bears witness to us that we are children of God,
who guides the Church by the Gospel
and reveals to us the glory of Jesus Christ.
- I believe in the Church of Christ,
hidden and universal,
visible and invisible,
sinful and forgiven.
- I believe that there is a bond between Jesus Christ and all
people everywhere.
- I believe that the kingdom of God is the hope shared by us
all.

Order of Worship 7

Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth
and of all things known and unknown.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord,
who became human for our salvation.
He died and rose again.
He is in God's presence and he sends us the Holy Spirit.
He will come again in glory to judge humankind,
to transform the earth,
to hallow the achievements of history,
and to establish his eternal reign.

I believe in the Holy Spirit.
I believe in the Church of Christ, poor and loved of God,
commissioned to proclaim and live the Gospel.

I believe that we mortal human beings are destined to rise again
and to live eternally.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God ...

Despite his being silent and hidden,
we believe that he is alive.

Despite the existence of evil and suffering,
we believe that he has made the world for
happiness and life.

Despite the limits of our minds and the rebellion of our hearts,
we believe in God.

We believe in Jesus Christ ...

Despite the centuries separating us from him.
we believe in his word.

Despite his weakness and poverty,
we believe that his death is our life.

Despite our lack of understanding and our failure,
we believe that he is risen.

We believe in the Holy Spirit ...

Despite appearances,
we believe that he guides the Church.

Despite death,
we believe in resurrection.

Despite the existence of ignorance and unbelief,
we believe that the kingdom of God is for
all people everywhere.

Order of Worship 9

Responsive Affirmation of Faith

Brothers and sisters, do you believe in God the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

Response: We do.

Brothers and sisters, do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only
Son, our Lord, who was born, suffered, died and rose again
for you?

Response: We do.

Brothers and sisters, do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the
holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgive-
ness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life
everlasting?

Response: We do.

May God almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has given us new birth by water and the Spirit,
keep us by his grace in Christ unto eternal life.

(Translator's Note (Order 9): This affirmation is based on the
Apostles' Creed, and I have translated Sainte Eglise Universelle
by holy catholic Church, the usual form in which the Creed
appears in English.)

Translated from French
WCC Language Service

What We Believe ...

Declaration of the Protestant Charismatic Movements of France

This text was adopted and published by the group of editors of the French journal "Actes 2" (Acts 2) as a common confession of faith, representing in an informal way the spirit of charismatic renewal in Europe, to which they adhere.

We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, that it constitutes an infallible and complete rule of faith and conduct.

(Psalm 119:105; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16)

We believe in the unity of the living God, the only true God, revealed in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; in the virgin birth of the Son made man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; in his sinless life, in his miraculous ministry, in his death in our stead for the expiation of sins, in his bodily and glorious resurrection, in his triumphant ascension, in his faithful intercession and in his Return in glory before the Millennium.

(Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 90:2; Mark 12:29; Matthew 28:19; Luke 3:22; Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:26-38; 2:6-7; Acts 1:1-11; 2:22-26; Revelation 19:11ff.)

We believe in the fall of humanity; in salvation by faith in Christ; in the water baptism of believers by immersion; in the baptism in the Spirit, the normal evidence of which is speaking in tongues.

(Genesis 3; Acts 4:12; Acts 16:31; Acts 1:4-5; Acts 2; Acts 8:5-18; Acts 10:44-48; Acts 10:1-7)

We believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and in the ministries established by God in the Church, in the sanctification of life and conduct in accordance with God's will, in deliverance from sickness by divine healing, in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup in the Holy Supper, in the eternal salvation and happiness of all believers saved by Jesus Christ and in the eternal punishment of all those whose names will not be found written in the book of life.

(1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 14; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 12:14; Psalm 103:3; Mark 16:15-18; Acts 2:41-42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32)

We believe in the eternal and glorious new creation, with its 'new heavens' and the 'new earth' surrounding Christ and his glorified Church, and in which God will be all in all.
(1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 21 and 22)

French text in: Actes 2, Revue du Mouvement Charismatique en France 1(1976) 2

and in: Centre d'Etudes Oecuméniques de Strasbourg, Au delà des Confessions. Les mouvements trans-confessionnels, Paris 1979, p. 140-141

Translated from the French
WCC Language Service



An Account of Our Faith
The Baptist Union of Switzerland

During the years 1974-1977 an International Commission of representatives of Baptist communities from Switzerland, Austria, the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany worked on a common Account of Faith. Drafted statements were discussed at the level of the congregations and of the Baptist Councils in those countries. On June 11, 1977 the Baptist Convention of Switzerland approved the following text for use in the congregations.

This confession of faith is an expression of and a witness to the churches' agreement in belief. Thus it cannot itself be an object of faith or a compulsory law for faith. As a summary interpretation of Holy Scripture it is grounded in and limited by Scripture. It presupposes the Apostles' Creed as a common confession of Christendom and remains open to the future disclosure of further truth.

The ground and content of our confession is the central event of the rule of God. The predominantly narrative style is in harmony with this. As an account of faith this confession is meant to serve for instruction in the churches, for theological reflection, and for giving witness to the faith to the world. As a lively response of the believing community to God's effectual Word, confession of faith becomes praise of the mighty acts of God.*

* Following this preamble, the German version lists THE APOSTLES' CREED in a modern German translation proposed by an interdenominational commission in 1970 and widely accepted by German speaking churches in Central Europe.

P A R T I

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD'S RULE

1. God's Revelation in Jesus Christ

God has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ and in him has established his rule for the salvation of mankind.

(Heb 1:1ff; Gal 4:4f)

As the One who came from God, Jesus of Nazareth brought God near to men and men to God: With unique authority he called men back to the living God; he set them free from the bonds of godlessness, forgave their sins, healed the sick, and had fellowship at table with sinners. With his words and deeds the royal rule of God dawned.

(Mark 1:15; Eph 2:13; John 8:36; Mt 9:10-13)

The work of Jesus, who came to earth "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8), was brought to completion in his suffering and dying for all men. In Jesus' vicarious death for the guilt of humanity of all ages, God disclosed himself to us as the One who is love.

(Mark 10:45; 1 Cor 14:23-23; John 3:16; 1 John 4:16)

In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God made the work of reconciliation effectual and raised the crucified one to be the present Lord. God has made him, for us, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). With his resurrection the end of this age has begun. His resurrection gives assurance, to all of us who believe in him, of our resurrection to eternal life.

(1 Cor 15:14-22; Acts 2:36; Rom 4:25)

As the resurrected One, Jesus is exalted to the glory of the Father from which he came. In this exaltation he is Lord not only over his church, but over the whole world as well. Christ's rule is believed and proclaimed by his church; it will be recognized by all men when he comes as the perfecter of the world.

(John 17:4; Phil 2:5-11)

God's saving work in Christ reaches its initial aim in the proclamation by his church of the message of reconciliation. In the ministry of reconciliation, which is performed in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ himself is at work, and he places all the world under the claim of its Creator. The church that proclaims him and lives by his power becomes the sign of God's new world.

(2 Cor 5:17-21)

2. Man's Sin and His Turning to God

In the encounter with Jesus Christ we are made aware of the evil within us and in the structures of society as sin against God. God's reconciling and judging word lays bare to us the guilt of men as a denial of responsibility before God. Indifference and indolence, fear and self-assurance are expressions of our separation from God.

(Luke 5:8; Rom 3:22-24)

Always at work in evil is the Evil One, God's Adversary, who corrupts God's good creation. At the same time, evil issues from the heart of man, who succumbs to temptation and transgresses God's commandment. The doing of evil brings him under the dominion of the Evil One. Hence man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1) and is estranged from the life that is from God. He is abandoned to the powers and forces that are at enmity with God.

(Mark 7:20-23; John 8:34)

Turning away from God and contempt for his love lead to exploitation, oppression, and subjugation of man by men, but also to despairing solitude. The man who wishes to be like God and thinks that he can define good and evil according to his own estimates misses his own destiny. He corrupts God's good creation and threatens its very existence.

(Gen 3:1-17)

Rebellion against God's rule appears not only in morally reprehensible words and deeds. It can be actualized also in sacrificial commitment to liberty, peace, and justice, to religion, truth, and beauty. Any good deed can at the same time be, in relation to God, the most highly refined form of self-justification and self-seeking. In light of the love of God, the mystery of evil is disclosed even in men's "good" and "pious" deeds, and precisely in them, so that no one is right before God, and no one can live without grace.

(Rom 10:2-4)

Anyone who rejects God's offer of grace and forgiveness remains under the wrath and judgment of God, forfeits eternal life, and imprisons himself in his own wilful alienation from God. Unbelief leads to eternal perdition; but whoever accepts God's judgment upon his sins and the offer of grace lays hold upon the eternal life that Christ has secured for us.

(Rom 1:18; 2 Thess 1:9)

God's grace in Christ effects the conversion of man to God. Through faith in Jesus Christ man is made right before God and becomes a child of God. Faith is not a human achievement, but acceptance of God's grace. The believer experiences the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in forgiveness and liberation.

Through the working of the Holy Spirit he is born again to a new life with God.

(Rom 3:21-29; Rom 8:14-18; Col 1:13; 1 John 1:9)

3. The New Life from the Holy Spirit

The gospel brings every man - even the religious man - into crisis. It means judgment and renewal for one who turns to salvation in Christ. The Holy Spirit initiates in the believers a new life, whose ground and center is Jesus Christ himself.

(John 9:39-41; 1 Cor 2:14f; Rom 8:1-4; Gal 2:20)

The new life from the Holy Spirit takes its form by placing man in new relationship and by transforming his old relationship. It binds man to God and to His people, the church of Jesus Christ, and transforms all interpersonal relationships. The new life is expressed in our heeding God's word, in prayer, and in doing the will of God.

(1 Cor 12:12f; Jas 1:22-25; Mark 12:29-31)

The new life is God's gift, which should be preserved in submission and sanctification. It does not save us from afflictions and temptations, from suffering and oppression, from doubts and desires, but it gives us the strength to endure them and to confirm our faith in Jesus Christ. Even wrong choices and failures, errors and defeats cannot separate us from Christ, who remains faithful to us and forgives us our faults. The Holy Spirit is promised to us as our advocate and helper, and through the world of Holy Scripture God speaks to our lives. Bible reading, mutual brotherly counsel, and prayer offer the guidance to us on our way as disciples of Christ. The Christian is on the way, together with the church of Jesus Christ, toward the consummation of God's rule, and he lives even here and now in the liberty of the children of God to which his Lord has liberated him. Joy in the Lord is his strength.

(1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 6:1-10; Ps 32; Rom 8:26-28; John 5:39; 1 Thess 5:16-18; Gal 5:1; Neh 8:10)

4. God's Creation

In our belief in Jesus Christ we acknowledge that God through his word created the world out of nothing. God's original creation is matched by his creative power today, to which the existence of every man bears witness. This world of ours did not come into being of its own accord, but it has its origin and its destiny in the goodness of God, who imparts his life to his handiwork, because he wills not to remain alone, but to have fellowship with men as his creatures.

(Gen 1 and 2; Heb 11:3; Rom 4:17; John 1:4; Gen 1:27)

In spite of the sins of men, God preserves the world for its redemption. The Christian community lives in the midst of the yet-unredeemed world, as Christ is beginning in her the restoration of fallen creation. As children of God, Christians experience in themselves how God is beginning to lift the fate of death and nothingness that rests upon the world, by bestowing, through the Holy Spirit, liberty and righteousness, peace and joy. Together with the whole creation they yearn for the full and complete redemption that is promised to them.

(Mt 5:45; Acts 14:17; Rom 8:16ff; Rom 14:17)

As the Lord of history God is Lord of all men and nations, all ages and generations. He has given to men the charge, "Subdue the earth and rule over it." God's will and world bestow upon man his dignity and make him the holder of inalienable human rights.

(Acts 17:26; Gen 1:28; Ps 8:6)

Jesus Christ is Lord even over the fallen world, and he discloses to those who believe in him the overthrow of the world's gods, both manifest and hidden. Through him the world regains its goodness as God's creation. Therefore Christians take seriously their responsibility for the preservation and protection of creation.

(Mt 28:18; Col 2:15; 1 Cor 8:4; 1 Tim 4:4f; 1 Cor 3:21ff; Gen 2:15)

The Christian community acknowledges God as the Creator and preserver also of the structures of creation, in which we as Christians are called to live. God created man in his shared humanity. In marriage and family, society and state, he provides for man the setting for a life in community.

(Ex 20:1-17)

5. God's Old and New Covenants

In our belief in Jesus Christ, whom God brought forth from Israel in due time, we recognize Israel as God's chosen people. God has demonstrated in a unique way, in choosing and calling this people, his creative power and his lordship over all peoples. His love for all peoples led to the covenant with this special nation. In them God willed to bless all nations and to set them as a light for the peoples. God's election and calling of Israel have not been nullified by their unfaithfulness and disobedience. In God's preserving the Jewish people down to the present we perceive a sign of his faithfulness and mercy. The secret of this people is and remains their election and deliverance by God.

(Rom 9-11; Ex 19:5f; Deut 7:7f; Jn 4:22; Gen 12:1-3; Rom 11:26)

The new covenant, in which God has established his rule of grace for all men, dissolves the Old covenant and at the same time brings it to fulfilment. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, as he is the Messiah of Israel. Therefore salvation in Christ is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, for in Christ all the promises given to Israel are fulfilled in a manner and a measure going far beyond all the prophetic predictions in the Old Testament. In Christ all peoples are included in God's salvation, because from them the church of Jesus Christ as the new people of God is called and gathered.

(2 Cor 3; Jes 31:31-34; Heb 8:6-13; 2 Cor 1:20; Mt 28:19f)

6. God's Word - the Bible

Jesus Christ is God's Word in person to us men. In his life and work God has revealed himself comprehensively and definitively for the salvation of men. The resurrected and exalted Christ becomes present reality for us in the power of the Holy Spirit. He makes the proclamation of the gospel, which is accomplished through men, the word of God for us.

(Acts 4:12; Rom 10:13; Rom 1:16f; 1 Cor 1:18)

In the New Testament we hear the first witnesses to Jesus Christ. The Christian community is grounded in their testimony. That testimony cannot be expanded or superseded by any subsequent Christian proclamation or teaching. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the authors of the New Testament have borne witness to God's salvation that has appeared in Christ. This constitutes the authority and the normative character of the New Testament for the life and teaching of the church. It is the written word of God.

(1 Jn 1:1ff; Acts 1:2, 1:8)

The Old Testament bears witness to us of God's dealings with his people Israel and of God's will for all mankind. The Christian community understands the Old Testament from the perspective of God's revelation in Christ and sees it as pointing toward that revelation; for Christ is the goal and the end of the law. The New Testament bears witness to us of God's saving work in Christ for all mankind and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gospel of the crucified, risen, and coming Lord Jesus Christ is the center of the New Testament and hence of the entirety of Holy Scripture.

(Ex 20:1-17; Rom 10:4; Acts 2; Jn 5:39)

The Bible is God's word in human language. Therefore its books bear the signs of the times in which they originated. Their language, their patterns of thought, and their literary forms are bound to the times and places whence they come. Therefore the historical understanding of Holy Scripture is an obligation of the Christian church and its theology, in their listening to the word of God. The historical interpretation of Scripture takes into account the working of the Holy Spirit, both in

originating and in expounding the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible lives, because God speaks through it.

(Heb 1:1; Lk 1:2-4; Jn 20:31f; 2 Tim 3:16f; 2 Pet 1:19-21)

P A R T II

LIFE UNDER GOD'S RULE

I. The Church of Jesus Christ

1. The Gathering and the Sending of the Church

God, who has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ and has established his rule for the salvation of men, calls men to a life under this rule. All who believe in Jesus Christ have been transplanted from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. Christ gathers them into his community in a common life, witness, and service. The Holy Spirit gives them the will to live in harmony with God's reconciliation. Because Christ first loved us and loves us still, we belong to the family of God as brothers and sisters. As Christ has accepted us, we also accept ourselves and those whom Christ has called, with us, to faith. As Christ has forgiven and still forgives us our sins, so we also forgive our neighbours.

(2 Cor 4:5f; Col 1:13f; Mk 3:31-35; Rom 15:7; Mt 6:12)

The church of Jesus Christ responds to God's reconciling act in praise and worship. Bowing before God she confesses her guilt and receives from him forgiveness and the authority for her mission. In evangelization and service the Christian community bears witness to God's salvation for all men. She intercedes in prayer and supplication for all men and nations. As God sent his Son into the world, so Jesus Christ today sends his church into the world. All members of the Church of Jesus Christ are under the commission of their Lord: "Preach the gospel to the whole creation!" (Mk 16:15).

(2 Cor 5:19f; Eph 1:3ff; Jn 15:1-8; 1 Tim 2:1ff; Jn 20:21; Mt 28:16-20; 1 Pet 2:9f)

2. Proclamation and Instruction

The sending of the church into the world is focused in the public proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all men and in the biblical instruction of her members and their children.

(Mk 16:15f; Deut 6:7-19, 20-25)

In the gatherings of the Christian community Jesus Christ establishes his rule, by giving his word to his disciples, assuring them of his forgiveness, bestowing his love on them, and granting to them his Holy Spirit. In the service of worship Jesus Christ constrains those who are his own to discipleship and

obedience, to faith and ministry, to love and hope. In the service of worship Jesus Christ calls men who are not yet Christians to the decision of faith and to the surrender of their lives to God's Lordship.

(Mt 18:20; Gal 3:2; Jn 20:22f; Acts 4:31; Rom 12:1f)

The task of Christian instruction is the training of the members of the community in the obedience of faith and their equipment for a responsible life. At the centre of this instruction are the study of the Bible and the translation of the gospel for our time and our world. The teaching of children and youth is a special task of the Christian church, which bears the responsibility before her Lord that the younger generation shall be encouraged to believe in Jesus Christ and to live as his disciples.

(Eph 4:15; Col 3:1ff; Col 3:20f)

3. Faith and Baptism

To all who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, God offers his grace in that gospel. In his word he calls for the response of faith. God's Spirit empowers man to make a mature decision for Jesus Christ. Whoever turns to God in repentance and faith receives forgiveness of his guilt and eternal life.

(Acts 2:38; 1 Thess 1:9f; Jn 5:24)

Man's conversion to God is expressed in his confession of Christ which he makes in the presence of God and men in baptism, which was instituted by Jesus Christ. Therefore, in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament, we baptize only those persons who on the basis of their personal faith ask for baptism and declare their intention with God's help to lead a life of obedience in discipleship to Jesus Christ. The baptism that was instituted by Jesus Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and is performed by the community with water and by immersion of the person, is a sign of the forgiveness of sins, of God's acceptance of the person, and of the renewal of the person by the Holy Spirit. In baptism one is equipped, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, for a new life of praise to God in discipleship to Jesus Christ. In baptism he is incorporated into the one body of Christ and is received into the fellowship of the church. By means of baptism Christ and his church declare their solidarity with the one who is baptized, who is recruited for struggling and suffering in the kingdom of God.

(Acts 8:36-38; 1 Pet 3:21; Lk 3:10ff; Mt 28:19f; Titus 3:5f; Rom 6:1-11; Col 2:9-15; 1 Cor 12:13; Mt 6:33; Acts 14:22)

4. The Lord's Supper

As the Lord of his church Jesus Christ has established the Lord's Supper as the act in which his people assemble with joy at his table, to share the bread and the cup in his name, and as a

sign that he gives himself to his disciples.

(1 Cor 11:23-29; 1 Cor 10:16f; Acts 2:47)

In the observance of the Supper we experience the saving nearness and fellowship of Jesus Christ, by recalling his suffering and dying for us. We experience anew our acceptance by the crucified and risen Christ. In the supper we experience fellowship with all our brothers and sisters whom God has called to faith along with us. In worship and with thanksgiving and supplication we celebrate our reconciliation with God and with each other.

(Lk 24:30-35; Mt 26:26-28; Acts 2:42)

We celebrate the Lord's Supper in joyous anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ and the consummation of his rule, by proclaiming the Lord's death until he returns. We are sent forth from the Lord's table, strengthened and with renewed faith and courage, to a new life with Christ in discipleship, witness, and service.

5. Spiritual Gifts, Ministries, and Orders

In the experience of the grace of God the members of the community of Jesus Christ are given gifts of grace that serve to build up the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit bestows in the community particularly the gifts of proclamation and teaching, of love and care, of leadership and day-to-day direction. Thus the Spirit of God enables the people, on their way through time, to fulfill their mission. There is no member of the body of Christ without gifts. All gifts of the Spirit are bestowed with the aim of forming our life under God's gracious rule in peace and order, in cooperation and mutual regard. The priesthood of all believers is the basic structure that is given to the Christian church by her Lord.

(1 Cor 12-14; Rom 12:1-8; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Pet 2:5-10)

The Christian community calls suitable men and women, whose special endowment by the Holy Spirit and calling by God she recognizes, into special ministries and equips them to perform these ministries. In particular she provides for the ministries of proclamation, instruction, pastoral care, service to the needy, and leadership. Spiritual gifts and offices alike serve the gathering-together and the sending-forth of the church of Jesus Christ.

(1 Tim 3; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 5:17-22; 1 Tim 4:12-16; 2 Tim 2:2)

Each local congregation is understood as a manifestation of the one body of Christ and is responsible for ordering its own life and ministry. These local congregations are bound together, not primarily through organizational ties, but by the one Lord and the one Spirit. The congregations strengthen each other through fellowship in the faith, and by learning from each other, through intercession and by mutual aid. Such things as structure of the

congregation and denominational organization, administration and finance, institutions and works, are not ends in themselves, but are instruments of the mission of the church in this world.

(1 Cor 1:2; Eph 4:3-6; 1 Cor 16:1-4)

6. Pastoral Care and Church Discipline

The pastoral care of the members is entrusted to the entire congregation. The aim of this pastoral care is to encourage and empower all members of the community to live a life of discipleship to Jesus Christ and of submission to God. Rebuke and comfort, confession of sin and promise of forgiveness serve this aim, as do sharing in joys and fears, sufferings and trials, afflictions and distresses of our neighbours. Here the word of Scripture applies: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2)

(Phil 2:1ff; 1 Pet 4:10f; Gal 6:1; Jas 5:19f; Rom 12:9ff)

If in a member of the church the belief in Jesus Christ is extinguished, the love of God and neighbour has grown cold, and all pastoral efforts to bring that person back to Christ and his church remain fruitless, the community will exclude him from its fellowship. In the case of conscious and wilful offense and sin against God's manifest will and of persistence in that way, the community has no alternative but to use this means of discipline. It will do this in sorrow for not having believed firmly enough and not having loved devotedly enough, and in the hope that the member under discipline will find grace with God anew and will return to the fellowship of the Church.

(Mt 18:15; 1 Cor 5:13; 1 Tim 1:19f; 1 Cor 5:5)

7. The One Body of Christ and the Divided Churches

The Christian experiences the fellowship of the church primarily in the local gathering of the believers. There the one baptism upon confession of faith is performed and the one bread, instituted by the one Lord, is broken and shared. Therefore the local congregation is seen to be the manifestation of the one body of Jesus Christ, permeated by the one Spirit and filled with the one hope.

(Eph 4:3-6; 1 Cor 10:16f)

The one Spirit bestows many gifts, which can be exercised in the local congregations but also in the churches that are separated from each other, in a mutually enriching diversity. Jesus Christ is building his community in the various churches and fellowships. Regardless of the diversities, and regardless of error and fault on all sides, it cannot be God's will for denominational barriers to hinder the visible fellowship of all believers and thus their credible testimony to all the world. Therefore we pray, with Christians of the whole earth, for the renewal of all communions and churches, that more mutual recognition may become possible, and that God may lead us to the

unity that he wills for us. Even today it is the task not only of individual Christians from various churches, but also of these churches themselves, to take whatever steps are possible out of their separation toward each other, to eliminate existing prejudices, and conscientiously for formulate and to represent objections, to learn from each other, to pray for each other and together to glorify Christ in witness and service.

(1 Cor 12:1-11; Jn 17:22f; Eph 4:1-6; Acts 15; Gal 2)

II. Christians in the World

1. The Responsibility of Faith in the Situation of the Diaspora

It is the will of God for the Christian church to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This church seeks no dominion in society or over society, but is called and empowered for worship of God in the everyday life of this world and thus for the development of shared human life by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church as a whole and each of its members are ready for the responsibility of faith. They speak for God and his righteousness, and in their life as brothers and sisters God's gracious rule can be discerned.

(Mt 5:13-16; Rom 12:1ff; Jn 13:1-17; 1 Pet 3:15; Rom 3:21-31; Acts 2:42-47)

We live as Christians scattered among those who do not believe. In this situation where we are a minority and are on a mission, we know that in our work and our leisure, in the family and in society we are called to serve God in all our fellow men. Because Christians rejoice in being accepted by God and called to be his co-workers, they live their faith in bearing witness to Christ personally, in demonstrating their solidarity with people who are suffering, in acts of personal assistance, and thus in obedience to the commandment that we love our neighbours. To take our stand for the truth of Jesus Christ also includes our readiness to accept disadvantage and even persecution.

(1 Pet 1:1-12; 1 Cor 3:9; Mt 5:43-48; 1 Pet 4:12-19)

2. The Call to Reconciliation

Because we have our origin in reconciliation with God, we are called also to serve the cause of reconciliation among men. In this spirit Christians make their contribution to understanding between generations, social and political groups, parties, classes, races, and nations. They strive to eliminate any and all discrimination by persons against persons and work for peace in the world. The Christians' calling is to be validated precisely when in substantive issues they must speak a resounding "No". The readiness for reconciliation works for agreement, but it does not mean capitulation in the face of conflict or suppression of real problems.

(Gal 3:27f; Eph 2:14; Mt 5:9; Gal 2:1-10)

Because we have our origin in God's justification of the ungodly, we are called to serve the cause of justice among men. Since Christians live in the liberty for which Christ has set them free, they oppose every form of dependence that injures human dignity. In the spirit of Jesus they support corresponding efforts to liberate men from economic, social, and racial oppression. Accordingly, they contend for the basic freedoms of man, especially for freedom of belief and of conscience.

(Eph 6:9; Rom 14:19; Heb 12:14)

3. Marriage and Family

Man and woman are called, in accordance with the will of God, to be joined in lifelong marriage and to build their life together in love and fidelity. Marriage offers a fundamental and exemplary portrayal of God's will for the ordering of shared human life. One persons esteems the other more highly than himself and accepts him as Christ has accepted him.

(Gen 1:27; Gen 2:18-25; Mk 10:7-9; Eph 5:25)

For the person who is reconciled with God, bodily existence and sexuality are good gifts from the hand of the Creator. In love for one's partner one will use these gifts responsibly before God. Man and woman, united in marriage, are privileged by God to share in the creation of new life, to be responsible for their children in love and care, to train them in the sight of God, to develop their gifts, and to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ.

(1 Cor 6:16f; Mk 10:13-16)

In the unmarried state also the Christian can discover and accept God's guidance and opportunity. Both gifts, marriage and the unmarried state, are given to Christians to mold their shared life in accordance with God's will and to place it at the service of God's rule. Accordingly, Christians will conduct their lives, in keeping with the model of the New Testament, in homes that are open and hospitable, places of a common life in conversation and celebration, work and prayer, caring for and comforting one another.

(1 Cor 7:7; Gal 6:2; Heb 13:1-3)

Unrestrained exercise of sexuality is a sign of man's alienation from God, from himself, and from his fellowman. Christians will not abet the deification of sexuality, but will set an example of how the freedom of the children of God takes its form in a new life.

(1 Cor 6:9ff)

4. Christians in Society and State

In accordance with God's will, shared human life finds its form, in the history of this world, in structures of society and in

orders of the state. For the maintenance of these orders there is need of law and of the state's instruments of power, but also of the intercession and thanksgiving of the church. Christians stand ready to accept responsibility for the well-being of their fellowmen and to share in the task of shaping social and political orders in accordance with human dignity. Christians and Christian communities will seek in every social and political system to find ways to fulfill their mission.

(Rom 13:1-7; Jer 29:7; 1 Tim 2:1ff)

Social and political order may not be confused and intermingled with the rule of God and the church of Jesus Christ and can never take the place of these. Therefore we stand for the separation of state and church. Social and political order represents a mandate of God for the world. Its claim is limited: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." (Mt 22:21). It is not in keeping with the will of God for society and state to lay claim to man in his totality and to leave him no room for living under the rule of God and in the Christian church. When conflict arises in this matter, "One must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)

(2 Pet 3:13; Rev 13)

Over against all social and political theories with their human designs for a manageable future, Christians bear witness to God's promise of a new creation and confess God's rule as the future of the World.

P A R T I I I

THE CONSUMMATION OF GOD'S RULE

1. The Future of the Christ who has Come

Jesus Christ, the Lord of his church and of his world, who was crucified, rose from the dead, and was raised to the right hand of God, will appear, on the day that God alone will determine, in glory as the fulfiller of God's kingdom and as judge of all men. The Christ who will return is the future of our world and at the same time he is the unsurpassable limit of the progress of which men are capable as well as the end of the history of human failure.

(Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Acts 1:7; Rev 18:21-24; Rev 21:4)

Jesus Christ's appearing in glory will transform the belief and unbelief of men into sight. The same Lord who already rules over church and world will make his hidden Lordship manifest to all. The return of Christ will bring an end to the time of the preaching of the gospel. The last day of our world-epoch will also be the first day of God's new creation.

(Mt 5:8; 1 Jn 3:2; Rev 20:11-21:8)

In view of this hope we, as the Christian community, confess all the more surely that eternal life is granted to us even now and that the same Spirit who creates new life today will transform our mortal bodies. We confess that no power of death is able to separate us from God's love and that the dying person rests in the sheltering hands of the God who raised our Lord Jesus Christ.

(1 Cor 15:20; Rom 8:11; Jn 14:19; Rom 8:38-39)

The return of Jesus Christ will bring about the downfall of all forces that oppose God and will lead the still believing and waiting, suffering and faltering Christian church out of all its affliction and temptation into the fulfillment of God's rule. The annihilation of evil and of death will unveil to all eyes God's intention for his fallen creation: the ultimate redemption of the people of God and the restoration of the creation to the peace of God.

(Mt 6:12; 1 Jn 1:8; Rev 20:14, 21:4; 1 Cor 15:56; Rom 8:19-23)

In view of this hope the Christian church confesses its Lord as the future of the world. In the strength of this hope the church works for the renewal of men through the grace of God which is proclaimed in the gospel, and through faith which is active in love.

(1 Cor 15:58; 1 Thess 1:9f)

2. The Judgment of the Coming Christ

With the appearing of Jesus Christ we anticipate the resurrection of the dead as the ultimate demonstration of God's creative and redemptive power. But the resurrection of the dead also signifies that we are set in the presence of our judge, "so that each one receives his reward for what he has done in his life-time, whether it be good or evil" (II Cor 5:10).

(Rom 2:16; Acts 10:42)

As judge, Christ implements the gospel. He discloses whether the works of men are wrought by God's power or of men's own doing. The faith that has responded to the gospel is recognized by Christ. Whatever is being done now in the authority of the risen Christ and of the Holy Spirit, every pronouncement of forgiveness as well as the binding and remembering of sins, will then be publicly confirmed by Christ as judge. All self-made righteousness and all self-willed detachment of man from God will be brought to light in the judgment, will be excluded from the new creation, and will end in final separation from God. God respects the freedom of his creature, in that he allows to unbelief the reality that it has chosen for itself. Anyone who rejects God's love, him God will reject.

(Mt 10:32f; Mt 18:18; Mt 25:45f; Lk 14:16-24; Lk 14:16-24; Jn 3:36)

We extol the love of the God who is free in his grace and mercy, who does not will the death of the sinner but his repentance, whose aim is the redemption and not the rejection of man, whose intention is not the perdition but the salvation of the world.

(Ezek 18:23; 1 Tim 2:4)

3. God's New World

God's aim for the world and for humanity is eternal life in a new creation. God's will is directed toward the new man, who ultimately will attain his destiny to live by God's power and for God, and toward the new people of God, who ultimately will be liberated for true worship of God. God wants to be their God for eternity, and they are to be his people forever.

(Rev 21:1-5; Jn 17:24; Rev 22:3-5)

As surely as this future is promised to the Christian church, it is far from being able properly to grasp and to express the vision of the new heaven and the new earth. The church takes the biblical parables and images of the earthly paradise, of the celestial city, of the Father's house, and of the new banquet as a sign and an earnest of the promised glory in which God's rule will come to fulfillment. God's new creation will be the world of resurrected, transformed, and transfigured bodily existence. In that world, death and tears, hunger and pain, injustice and sin, loneliness and godforsakenness will be no more. Instead, there will be joy and peace, righteousness and blessedness, adoration and the vision of God forever. In God's new world the creation will find happiness and fulfillment. The perfect and complete redemption of the created universe will also be the final victory of the honour and glory of God.

(Rev 22:1-2; Rev 21:9-27; Jn 14:2; Lk 22:16ff; 1 Cor 15:42-49; 1 Cor 15:28)

Our Hope

Joint Synod of Roman Catholic Dioceses in the FRG

This document is a statement of theological principles, written at the Joint Synod of Roman Catholic Dioceses, held in Würzburg, FRG, from 1971 until 1975. The 8th Assembly of the Joint Synod adopted this document on 22 November 1975, with 225 votes in favour, 26 votes against, and 15 abstentions. It has the status of an official synodal document.

This Confession of Faith consists of four parts:

- I. Witness to hope in our society*
- II. The one witness and the many messengers of hope*
- III. Ways of discipleship*
- IV. Programmes for the whole church and society as a whole.*

INTRODUCTION

"Accounting for our hope" as a task of the Church

A Church seeking to be renewed has to know who it is and what it is aiming for. Nothing demands more trust than real change. A synod wishing to assist the process of reform must therefore also speak of what it means to be Christians and members of this Church and of the basis of all efforts for a living Church in our time.

We must try to give to ourselves and those among whom we live "an account of the hope that is in us" (I Pet 3:15). We must make sure that in our concern with many detailed questions and plans we do not overlook those questions which have arisen among ourselves and within the society in which we live, questions which can no longer be suppressed: questions about the meaning (if any) of Christian existence in our time. There will, of course, be as many answers to these questions as there are forms of vital Christianity among us. But we have no right to leave the individual to face alone the fiery trial of such questions, unless we want to (continue to) run the risk of desperate loneliness, indifference and tacit apostasy, and to stand idly by while people become spiritually more and more alienated from the Church. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that far too many people, while continuing to avail themselves of our Church's sacramental ministrations, do so in a purely formal way and less and less with a seriousness which leaves its mark on their lives.

To pose such "radical" questions publicly in the Church is one element in our recognition of the radical character of the situation in which our Church finds itself pastorally today and in which it continues to bear witness to its hope. Only as our Church keeps these questions before it - at least in a rudimentary way - will it avoid the impression of often giving answers to questions which are not really being asked or of ignoring people altogether in delivering its message. Only in this way will it also counteract the prejudiced view that its real purpose in introducing ultimately useless reforms is simply to cover up the loss of the power of the Christian faith, to convince and comfort. It has no right to talk of detailed reforms within the Church itself when it daily encounters the strong suspicion that Christianity's only answer to the questions and fears, the conflicts and hopes within our society, to the painful discovery of the meaninglessness of our mortal life and of our public and private calvaries, still consists in outworn words and forms.

Here we must speak openly and explicitly of the hope which is ours through faith: for it is this above all which seems to be required and unconsciously expected of us under many different guises. To be ourselves renewed in this hope and to draw from it the "demonstration of the spirit and of power" for our time - this is the underlying concern which must ultimately direct all the detailed discussions and plans of this joint synod. We shall therefore speak of the comforting and challenging power of our hope - among ourselves, among and for all who live along with us in the fellowship of this Church, but also for all who have difficulties with this Church, the afflicted and disappointed, the wronged and the embittered, the seekers who have not come to terms with the menacing suspicion that life is meaningless and who therefore do not start from the assumption that religion is an exploded illusion, a vestige of earlier stages in humankind's cultural development.

In this aim, we recognize that we are also partners with the World Council of Churches which has itself summoned all Christians to give an account of the hope that is in them.

PART I: WITNESS TO HOPE IN OUR SOCIETY

In speaking of the substance and basis of our hope we must be content here simply to offer hints and to select. The subjects selected, however, allow the whole richness of the Church's creed, which also constitutes the basis of this document of our faith, to shine through. Our selection cannot be dictated by preference or caprice, however, but must be governed by the commission to account for our hope in and for our own times. We shall try to speak of what appears to us to be essential here and now - above all in view of our milieu in the Federal Republic of Germany. We realize, of course, that the selection of these particular themes and even the concrete way in which they are developed may seem to many to be too subjective.

This milieu is no longer that of a society deeply marked by religion. On the contrary, the "axioms" which dominate it often

operate collectively as a countercurrent to our hope. Consequently, they make it extremely difficult to correlate this message of hope with people's experiences of their milieu, re-inforcing their feeling that in their concrete daily life this message no longer concerns or speaks to them, comforts or challenges them. We shall try, therefore, to focus our witness to hope on these ostensible "axioms" of our social milieu. In doing so our concern will not be to defend ourselves stubbornly but to examine ourselves critically again and again; the aim will be the unity of thought and action, spirit and practice, with a view to the transformation of our witness into an invitation to hope.

1. God of our hope

The name of God is buried deep in humankind's history of hope and suffering. Here we encounter this name, shining out and obscured, adored and denied, misused and profaned but unforgotten. The "God of our hope" (cf. Rom 15:13) is "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Ex 3:6; Mt 22:32), "who made heaven and earth" (Ps 121:2) and whom we publicly confess along with the Jewish people and with the religion of Islam, just as we continue even today to use in our prayers the ancient cry of hope: "My cares give me no peace. I am panic-stricken at the shouts of my enemies, at the shrill clamour of the wicked; ... My heart is torn with anguish and the terrors of death come upon me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me and I shudder from head to foot. Oh that I had the wings of a dove ... But I will call upon God; the Lord will save me" (Ps 55:2b-6a, 16). The fact that we continue to use such words today means that we do not stand alone and apart; on the contrary, we allow this history of humankind, which in the last analysis is a religious history right down to our own day, the right to a vote, the right to a say in what we have to think about ourselves and are permitted to trust in.

The God in whom we believe is the ground of our hope, not a stop-gap for our disappointments. But the society in which we live tends more and more to see itself as a society of wants, a network of wants and their satisfaction. But in a society where social and public interests are determined exclusively by this structure of wants, our Christian hope has only a twilight existence. For this hope expresses a longing which transcends all our wants. Anyone unable to escape from the prison of a thinking bounded by wants will in the end be unable to do other than criticize the "God of our hope" as a futile illusion, as an imaginary fulfilment of frustrated wants, as a fraud and as a false consciousness, and will easily dismiss the religion of hope as a phase in the history of human self-development which has since been seen for what it really is and is now already out of date. The divine message of our Christian hope is opposed to an absolutely banal picture of man as merely a bundle of wants, a creature without any sense of longing, i.e. without, too, any capacity for grief and therefore without any capacity to let himself really be comforted or to understand comfort as anything more than merely empty promises. The divine

message of our Christian hope resists any complete equation of man's yearning with the sum-total of his wants.

This does not make the name of God a code-word for a dangerous appeasement or an over-hasty reconciliation with our painfully torn world. For it is precisely this hope in God which causes us again and again to suffer because of meaningless suffering. It is this hope in God which makes it impossible for us to come to terms with the meaninglessness of this suffering. It is this hope in God which awakens in us again and again the hunger for meaning, the thirst for justice for all people, for the living and the dead, for the unborn and the departed, and which prevents us from settling down exclusively within the truncated dimensions of our world of wants.

2. Life and death of Jesus Christ

Our hope is Jesus Christ. We are confident that we shall be saved when we call upon him in faith (Rom 10:13). In him the God of our hope has declared himself Father and this pledge is irrevocable: God's eternal Word has become man, one of us.

Among many people today there is a new interest in the life and conduct of Jesus: interest in his friendliness to human beings, his unselfish solidarity with the lot of the stranger and the outcast, his way of disclosing to his hearers a new understanding of their life as rich in possibilities, in the way he freed them from fear and blindness and at the same time made them aware of their complacency and hardness of heart in face of the suffering of others, and in the way he constantly tried in all this to turn those who heard his message into doers of the Word. Valuable stimulus to and guidance for a life based on hope can be derived from such encounters with Jesus.

And it is vitally important that the public life of the Church should be just as much influenced by such stimuli as the conduct of individual Christians. Only then will it be possible to overcome in a positive way the hiatus in the lives of many Christians today, namely the dissonance between a life guided by Jesus and a life guided by a Church whose public appearance is inadequately imprinted with the spirit of Jesus. We cannot overcome this hiatus, of course, by allowing the divine mystery in Jesus to be withdrawn or watered down in favour of his supposedly more comprehensible and more practical message of love. For the love which Jesus did in fact announce would be emptied of meaning without the reality of his eternal divine sonship. The radical character of that love - including as it does love for our enemies - would in any case make it seem a grotesque overtaxing of human capacity.

In the resurrection of Jesus the history of hope which is the foundation of our faith has become invincible. In the confession of Jesus as the "Christ of God (Lk 23:35) it achieves its life-changing and liberating purchase on us. This history of hope in which Jesus is shown to be the living Son of God is not an uninterrupted story of success, no triumphal progress, by our standards. On the contrary, it is a history of suffer-

ing, and only in and through this history of suffering can we Christians speak of that happiness and joy, that freedom and peace which the Son has promised us in his good news of the "Father" and of the "kingdom of God".

For people in our society of abundance, especially, the sense of such a history of hope seems, of course, to become increasingly obscure. Is not our society becoming increasingly the helpless victim of a widespread indifference, a growing insensitivity, to suffering? Exposed daily to a flood of announcements from all parts of the world telling us of death, disasters and suffering, to repeated pictures of brutality and horror, we seek - for the most part unconsciously - to make ourselves immune to impressions which we cannot possibly cope with effectively in such quantity. Many try to insure themselves against calamity of any kind. Others seek refuge in narcotics. Others again seek salvation in the utopia of a society without suffering. Suffering today is for them only the prelude to the final victory of human freedom and is often too naively identified simply with the history of remediable social oppression. But these utopias have lost their appeal since deep fissures have appeared in the perfectly technologized world. Suffering has become for many an irrational embarrassment or else a reason for a barely concealed fear of life.

To get closer to the meaning of our Christian history of hope, therefore, we must first of all ignore this anonymously imposed ban on suffering in our "progressive" society. We are not suggesting here that the essential struggle against suffering should be impeded but rather that we should recover our capacity to suffer in order to be able to suffer also in the suffering of others and in this way to approach the mystery of the suffering of Jesus who became obedient unto death (Phil 2:8) in order to make our return to God and therefore true freedom possible. Without this capacity for suffering, technology and civilization may be possible but we cannot advance a single step in matters of truth and freedom without it. Nor a single step towards any hope which looks to a suffering, crucified Messiah! Only by a critical, loving and practical solidarity with our contemporaries can we Christians bear witness here to our hope.

The message of Jesus also applies critically to ourselves, of course, who look in hope to his cross. It does not allow us to focus on the story of his suffering in such a way as to forget the anonymous history of suffering in the world, in our concentration on the cross of Jesus to forget the many crosses in the world, in our concern with his passion to be silent about the many torments and countless instances of anonymous death, the sufferings passed over in silence, the persecution of untold thousands of human beings tortured to death in this century because of their faith, race or political attitude in fascist or communist régimes, the children done to death from Herod's day down to Auschwitz in our own. But in the history of the Church and of Christianity have we not separated Christ's hope-giving suffering too sharply from the single passion story of humankind? By linking the Christian idea of suffering exclusively to his cross and to ourselves as his disciples, have we not created free zones in our world where the suffering of others

goes on unhindered? Have not we Christians often shown an appalling insensitivity and indifference to this suffering? Have we not relegated it to a "purely secular realm" - as if it had never been told us that the One on whom our hope is fixed comes to meet us precisely here in this "secular" history of suffering and judges how seriously we hope in him: "Lord, when did we ever see you suffering? ... Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" (Mt 25). Only as we Christians are alert to hear the dark prophecy of this suffering and apply it fruitfully to ourselves, do we hear and confess aright the hopeful message of Christ's suffering.

3. Resurrection of the dead

In his passion Jesus experienced the utmost depths of suffering right to the bitter ending on the cross. But even throughout the worst suffering and final abandonment, God upheld the crucified Jesus and delivered him once and for all from the darkness of death. This we confess in the words of the early Christian creed: "Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; ... he was buried; ... he was raised to life on the third day, according to the scriptures; ... he appeared to Cephas and afterwards to the Twelve" (I Cor 15:3-5). The crucified thus became the death of death itself and for us all "him who has led the way to life" (Acts 3:15; 5:31; cf. Heb 2:10).

Looking to this Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, we also hope for resurrection from death for ourselves. Our present milieu seems particularly blind to this secret of our hope. Obviously we are all too much influenced by the anonymous pressure of a social consciousness which makes the message of the resurrection of the dead more and more remote from us because it has already first of all cut us off from any sense of communion with the dead. It is true that we modern people are still stricken with grief and pain, with melancholy and mute suffering at the unalleviated suffering of the past, at the suffering of the dead. But even stronger, it seems, is our fear of contamination in the presence of death itself, our insensitivity towards the dead. But are there not too few among us who treasure or seek even friends or brothers among these dead? Which of us feels something of their discontent, their silent protest at our indifference, at our unseemly eagerness to dismiss them and get on with the business of life?

Most of us are good at defending ourselves vigorously against these and similar questions. We either suppress them or describe them as "unrealistic". But what sort of "realism" is this? Is it that our sense of distress is so fleeting and superficial and that many of our griefs are so banal? But a "realism" of this kind obviously has its own tabus, as well, by which grief is repressed in our social consciousness, gloom of any kind made suspect and any enquiry about the life of the dead made to seem idle and pointless. But to forget or suppress this question of the life of the dead is to behave in a profoundly inhuman way. For it means forgetting and suppressing the sufferings of the past and accepting without protest the pointlessness of this

suffering. In the last resort, no happiness enjoyed by the children can make up for the pain suffered by the fathers, and no social progress can atone for the injustice done to the departed. If we persist too long in accepting the meaninglessness of death and in being indifferent to death, all we shall have left to offer even to the living will be banal promises. It is not only the growth of our economic resources which is limited, as we are often reminded today, but also the resources of meaning and it is as if our reserves are melting away and we are faced with the real danger that the impressive words we use to fuel our own history - words like freedom, liberation, justice, happiness - will in the end have all their meaning drained out of them.

This is the situation in which we Christians confess our hope in the resurrection of the dead. Far from being a beautiful utopian dream, this hope is rooted in the witness of Christ's own resurrection which has been the core of our Christian fellowship right from the very beginning. What the disciples attested was not something they had dreamt up according to their own desires but a reality established in them in spite of all their doubts, a reality which enabled them to confess: "The Lord is risen indeed!" (Lk 24:34). The hopeful message of the resurrection of the dead, founded on this Easter event, tells of a future for all, for the living and the dead. And precisely because it tells of a future for the dead, because it affirms that these long forgotten ones are unforgettably in the thought of the living God and that they live for ever in him, this message of hope is news of a truly human future which is not repeatedly being wiped out by the waves of an anonymous evolutionary process and devoured by an indifferent natural destiny. Because it tells of a future for the dead it is a message of justice, a message of resistance to all attempts to simply halve the meaning of life which we constantly long for and seek to reserve it, if at all, only for those yet unborn at any given time, only for the survivors, for the lucky final winners and beneficiaries of our human history.

Hope in the resurrection of the dead, faith that the ramparts of death have been breached, liberates us for a life which resists the pure self-assertiveness whose meaning is death. This hope moves us to live for others, to transform the life of others by suffering for them and in solidarity with them. In this way we make our hope visible and vital, learn to know ourselves and to communicate as "Easter" men and women. "We for our part have crossed over from death to life; this we know, because we love our brothers. The man who does not love is still in the realm of death" (I Jn 3:14).

4. Judgment

Our hope in the resurrection of the dead is closely connected with the Christian hope in the form of our expectation of God's final judgment on our world and on human history. But how can the message of God's judgment possibly be formulated as an expression of our hope? Nevertheless, while this message of divine judgment may indeed conflict with the dreams of progress and

harmony which we so readily combine with our concept of "salvation", it does contain at least one promising element of the Christian Gospel, namely, the distinctively Christian concept of the quality of all human beings, a concept which does not end up in egalitarianism but insists on the equality of all human beings in their answerability to God for the practical conduct of their lives and also brings news of an imperishable hope to all those who suffer injustice. The Christian notion of equality is concerned with justice for all people. Far from paralysing our concern for the struggle for justice for all in history, it constantly reawakens a sense of responsibility for justice for all. Otherwise how could we survive the judgment of God?

It will be asked: have not we ourselves in the Church often obscured this liberating dimension of the message of God's final judgment by proclaiming it loudly and urgently to the poor and defenceless but usually only half-heartedly and in a whisper to the powerful in this world? But if ever any declaration of our hope was tailor-made to be confessed boldly "before governors and kings" (cf. Mt 10-18) especially, this surely is it! Moreover its full power to comfort and encourage is also clear. It tells of God's power to establish justice; it declares that our longing for justice is not in fact shipwrecked by death, that justice as well as love is stronger than death. Finally, it speaks of God's power to establish justice, a power which dethrones death, robs death of its tyrannous power over our consciences and guarantees that death does not put the final seal on the tyranny of masters and the bondage of slaves. Is such a message not to be understood as an expression of our hope? As a message which frees us to work for justice in season and out of season? As a spur which helps us to oppose structures of injustice which cry to heaven? As a standard which forbids us to come to terms with injustice and lays upon us the obligation to protest against injustice time and again lest we bring shame on our own hope?

We do not gloss over the fact that this message of God's judgment also speaks of the dangers of eternal destruction. It forbids us to assume a priori that there is reconciliation and purification for all people and for all that we do or leave undone. By doing so, this message penetrates our lives convertingly again and again and gives our historical responsibilities a greater seriousness and dramatic force.

5. Forgiveness of sins

Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, in whom God's pardon is near and who liberates us from sin and guilt. "In Christ our release is secured and our sins forgiven through the shedding of his blood" (Eph 1:7).

The society in which this confession of our hope is made is one which seeks more and more to rid itself of the very notion of guilt. In speaking of sin and guilt Christianity opposes that secret illusion of innocence which is spreading in our society and which leads us constantly to look for guilt and failure, if at all, only in the "others", among enemies and opponents, in

the past, in nature, in predispositions, in our milieu. The history of our freedom seems schizophrenic, it operates as if split in two. A powerful self-exculpation mechanism is at work: successes, achievements and victories are our own work, but for the rest we practise the art of suppression, disclaiming our responsibility and constantly seeking fresh excuses to explain away the dark, catastrophic and unfortunate aspects of the history we ourselves make and record.

This secret illusion of innocence also affects our behaviour to one another. Far from favouring responsible dealings with other people it militates against them. It subordinates inter-human relationships to the dubious ideal of a freedom which insists on the innocence of a naturalistic egotism. But instead of liberating us, such "freedom" reinforces human solitariness and the absence of mutual human relationships.

Experience of this widespread subliminal insistence on innocence forces us Christians again and again back to the question of God. May it not perhaps be that the reason why we do not face up to God is that we do not face up to the abyss of our guilt and despair? Because our sense of evil has become superficial, because we hide from ourselves the suspected depths of our guilt, this "transcendence in reverse"? Because we are only too ready today to let ourselves be excused by ideological critics or psychoanalysts? These are serious questions but of course they should not inhibit us from studying, for example, the obsession with false guilt feelings which produces illness and unfreedom. What matters more, of course, is that we should see and accept genuine guilt which is often repressed.

The "God of our hope" is close to us across the gulf of guilt sincerely recognized and acknowledged - as He who judges our choices and at the same time forgives our sins. Our Christian hope, therefore, does not lead us to bypass our experience of guilt but rather bids us to deal realistically with it, even and especially within a society which properly strives for greater freedom and responsibility for all and is therefore extremely sensitive to the mischief which the talk of guilt can cause and has in fact caused in the history of Christianity. Has not the practice of our Church sometimes lent credence to the view that anyone who wanted to serve the cause of real human freedom had to combat the Church's preaching of guilt? And did not the practice of the Church contribute in this way to the creation of this fatal illusion of innocence in our society?

In any case our Christian proclamation of repentance must always resist the temptation to paralyse people by fear. It must oppose every attempt to misuse the Christian doctrine of guilt and sin in order to give the unholy oppression of human beings by other human beings a false appearance of legitimacy, with the result that the powerless are loaded with still more guilt and the powerful with still more "innocent" power! But it must also have the courage to awaken and keep alive the sense of guilt - all the more so in view of the growing social inter-relationship between our action and our responsibility, which extends today far beyond the limited area of our neighbourhood. The Christian message of guilt and repentance must be addressed

today to that structural involvement in guilt in which we find ourselves at present because of human dependence and inter-dependence at the world level and in face of the needs and the oppression of far-off foreign peoples and groups. It must insist that we can incur guilt not only by what we do or fail to do to others directly, but also by what we permit to happen to them; each one of us is called to acknowledge this involvement in guilt and to resist it to the limits of our strength.

In all this, our Christian talk of guilt and conversion is in no way a threat to freedom, but on the contrary it discloses freedom and rescues freedom. For it dares to summon men to freedom even where people are often accustomed today to see only biological, economic or social pressures at work and only too ready to invoke these pressures in order to shrug off their own responsibility.

Faith in divine forgiveness, as expressed in the various forms of church ministry, especially in the sacrament of penance, does not lead us to alienation from ourselves. It gives us strength to face up to our guilt and failure and to accept the fact that our lives, now marred by guilt, are destined for a better, sanctified future. It makes us free. It frees us from a deep-rooted inwardly consuming fear of existence which again and again turns our human hearts inward upon themselves. It prevents us from capitulation to the secret suspicion that our power to destroy and to degrade is ultimately stronger than our capacity to affirm and to love. But the forgiveness offered by Jesus also distinguishes Christianity from all grey systems of rigorous, self-righteous and joyless moralism. It delivers us from that sterile overstrain into which we are driven by a moralistically pointed dream of perfection which in the end destroys all joy in concrete responsibility. But joy in responsibility is precisely what the Christian notion of forgiveness gives us; it gives joy in that personal responsibility on which the Church increasingly counts and which it must evoke and cultivate more and more amid the increasing anonymity of our social life with the complexity and vastness of its life-situations.

6. Kingdom of God

We Christians hope for the "new man", the "new heaven and the new earth" in the consummation of the Kingdom of God. Of this Kingdom of God we can speak only in pictures and parables of the kind that are used to attest and describe our hope in the Old and New Testaments, above all by Jesus Christ himself. These pictures and parables of the great peace which human beings and nature itself will enjoy in the presence of God, of the one fellowship meal of love, of the home and the father, of the kingdom of freedom, reconciliation and justice, of how the tears of God's children are wiped away, of the laughter of the children of God - all these are precise and untranslatable. We cannot simply "translate" them; all we can really do is protect them, stick faithfully to them and resist dissolving them into the banal language or our concepts and arguments which, while they may speak to our needs and of our plans, do not speak to our longing and of our hopes.

The promises of the kingdom which has dawned irrevocably among us through Jesus Christ and become operative in the fellowship of the Church take us right down into the world in which we live - with all its many typical future plans and utopias. The promises of the Kingdom of God dawn on and illuminate these future plans and utopias, even in this age of science and technology and of vast social political changes.

Has not our public consciousness too long been permeated by a naive evolutionary optimism? By a willingness to trust implicitly and to invest all our hopes in a supposedly automatic advance in knowledge and technological civilization? The dream of an unlimited mastery over nature which could help us increasingly to an equally unlimited and growing discovery and satisfaction of human needs seems gradually to be fading. At the same time we are becoming far more aware of the ambiguity and radical menace implicit in a future planned and directed for humankind by the technocrats alone. Would this really create a "new man"? Or only a completely programmed man? Man with prefabricated patterns of life, uniform dreams, entombed in a computer society from which all surprises have been excluded, effectively dove-tailed into a world of anonymous forces and mechanisms constructed by a callous and indifferent rationality - disciplined until he finally becomes no more than a clever adaptable animal? And is it not becoming ever clearer in the experience of individuals that this "new world" creates inner emptiness, fear and flight? Are not sexualization, alcoholism and drug-consumption danger signals? Do they not point to a longing for attention, even a hunger for love which cannot in fact be met by technological and economic promises? By these questions we are not calling in question or attacking the special importance of science and technology in the creation of a milieu fit for human beings to live in. They are directed only against a quasi-religious faith in science and technology by which many people (scientists themselves often least of all) are subconsciously influenced their spirits confined and thus blinded to the radical promise and power of our Christian hope and to the luminosity of the pictures and parables of the Kingdom of God and of the new humanity in that Kingdom.

The Christian picture of hope and of the new humanity in the Kingdom of God is woven deeply into the texture of those pictures of the future which have inspired and still inspire the political and social freedom and liberation movements of modern times; it cannot and should not be arbitrarily divorced from them. For the promises of the Kingdom of God are not indifferent to the brutality and terror of earthly injustice and oppression which mar the human face. Hope in this promise inspires in us and demands of us a critical freedom and responsibility towards society which may only appear so pale and unimperative to us, perhaps even so "un-Christian", simply because we have practised it so little in our life as Christians and as the Church in the past. And when oppression and distress assume worldwide proportions as they do today this practical responsibility flowing from our hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God must also be freed to extend beyond its personal and parochial boundaries. The Kingdom of God is not indifferent to prices on the world market! Yet its promises are not identical,

for example, with the content of those social and political utopias which have a new humanity and a new earth, a happy consummation for humanity issuing from social and historical conflicts and processes, as the object of their hope and struggle. What we look for in our Christian hope is a consummation for humanity achieved by the transforming power of God himself, an eschatological event whose future has already begun for us in Jesus Christ. It is to him we belong, in him we have been implanted. In baptism we have been immersed in his new life and in the communion of the Lord's meal we receive the "pledge of the coming glory". As we put ourselves under "Christ's law" (Gal 6:2) and live as his disciples, we also become witness of this transforming power of God in the midst of the world in which we live: as peacemakers, as the merciful, as the poor in spirit and pure in heart, as those who mourn and struggle, as those with an unquenchable hunger and thirst for justice (cf. Mt 5:3ff).

This Christian picture of hope for the future of mankind does not snatch us out of the struggles of our human history; that would only be an illusion. What is characteristic of this hope is its sober realism about man and his self-realization in history. It shows man as remaining always a questioner and a sufferer; one whose longing constantly sets him at odds with his fulfilled needs and who, even if he were to live in some future time when all men were free from social and political oppression, would still seek and hope, for then especially he would be confronted radically and, as it were, inescapably, with himself and with the question of the meaning of human life. This realism in our idea of the Kingdom of God does not paralyse our concern with concrete personal and social suffering. It simply criticizes those secularized versions of the Christian hope which, while readily surrendering the message of the Kingdom of God itself, are still unwilling to abandon the extravagant standards which this message has set for men and for their future.

7. Creation

Our hope presupposes faith in the world as God's creation. And our faith in the creation reaches its climax in the hope of the new heaven and the new earth. Hope, on the one hand, and faith in the creation, on the other, are inextricably united, like the two sides of the same coin. Our hope includes therefore the readiness to acknowledge, without cynicism and false naivety, that this perishing world of ours, at odds with itself and painfully divided, can ultimately be legitimately affirmed at a deeper level as an occasion for thankfulness and joy, namely as God's creation. An essential part of our hope, therefore, is our capacity to affirm it and our freedom to celebrate and praise - even though there is so much which deserves to be rejected and even though things as they are are not at all what they should be. This readiness to affirm the world, as an element in our hope, sustained as it is by our faith in the creation, is not in any way equivalent to an uncritical endorsement of existing conditions. It does not seek to provide a religious cloak for the injustices prevalent in our world

which often distort by violence the goodness of creation which inspires us to joy and gratitude. On the contrary, it sensitizes us to the pains of the creation, to the groaning of the creatures, and this affirmative power of our hope cannot continue in us unless we again and again champion the view that the life of others, too, is worth affirming and can itself be a source of gratitude and joy.

Approval and gratitude, praise of the Creator and joy in the creation, are hardly virtues which are sought after, of course, in a society whose general outlook is profoundly immersed in the interplay of interests and conflicts which itself favours the strong and powerful while easily defeating the grateful and the friendly and pushing them to the margin. In the actual world in which man's only significant social action is what demonstrably promotes the mastery of nature or the satisfaction of needs, the one for the sake of the other, the capacity for celebration disappears along with the capacity to mourn. How long and how far have we submitted unresistingly to these processes? And where do they lead us? To apathy? To banality? However unlimited our human resources for achievement may be, the reserves of strength to give meaning to life, to resist the threat of banality, do not seem to be unlimited. Can the limits to our exploitation of nature bring us to our senses now that they are becoming steadily more onvius? Do these limits offer us new opportunities of becoming aware of the world as God's creation? And if so, do other practical forms of human behaviour, such as prayer and celebration, praise and thanksgiving, then acquire a new vividness and lose their unimpressive and insignificant appearance? Or should we at last admit that these postures are all an expression of an overweening hope of significance, simply the result of mistaken traditions and a mistaken education?

What is certain is that we Christians are not free to give up celebrating our hope as a festival which irradiates the world in which we live and expresses something of the solidarity of the whole created world within which man is called to rule but not to act arbitrarily. To learn to suffer in a world which is callous and tries to evade suffering, but also to learn to rejoice, to take earthly pleasure in God and his promises, in an overstrained world - this is not the least of the missions of our hope in and for this age.

8. Fellowship of the Church

"New creation" is an inaugurated reality in the community of the Church (cf. Gal 6:15f). This Church of which we are members is a fellowship of hope. And the memorial of the Lord in which we celebrate together the operative presence of his saving work "until he come" must become again and again for ourselves and for the world in which we live a critical reminder of our provisional status. The church is not itself the Kingdom of God, even although this Kingdom is "now present in mystery" (1). The

1. Vatican II, De ecclesia, 3.

Church, therefore, is not just a community of opinions, nor a forward-looking community of interests. It is grounded in the will and work of Jesus Christ, and his Holy Spirit is the living basis of its unity. He, the Holy Spirit of the ascended Lord, is the deepest source of our confidence: Christ in us the hope of glory (cf. Col 1:27). The community of hope which is the Church is not an association which can always present itself afresh as it wills. As a fellowship it takes the form of a people, the pilgrim people of God which is distinctive and shows its distinctiveness by describing its history as God's saving history with humankind, by repeatedly celebrating this history in its worship and seeking to live out this history.

The vitality of this people and of the experiences of fellowship granted within it depends, of course, on the vitality of this hope itself. For no one hopes only for himself. The hope we profess is not a vague general confidence nor is it an innate optimism about life. It is so radical and demanding that it cannot be entertained by anyone only for himself and relying on himself. Relying only on ourselves? How could that possibly end except in melancholy, barely concealed despair or blind selfish optimism? To dare to hope in God's Kingdom always means entertaining this hope for others and therefore also for oneself. Only when our hope is inseparable from hope for others, in other worlds, only when it automatically assumes the form and motion of love and communion, does it cease to be petty and fearful, a hopeless reflection of our egotism. "We for our part have crossed over from death to life; this we know, because we love our brothers" (I Jn 3:14).

Vigorous forms of church fellowship can therefore spring again and again from a hope which is really lived; and, on the other hand, the experience of church fellowship can again and again become a school in which living hope matures, where we can learn it together and celebrate it together. But do the forms of our church life adequately demonstrate to ourselves and to our contemporaries around us these characteristics of a fellowship of hope in which a new life rich in relationships develops and can therefore become a ferment of living fellowship with a society which is becoming steadily poorer in relationships? Or is not our public church life itself too overshadowed and constrained by fear and timidity, too preoccupied with itself, far too concerned with self-preservation and self-propagation, anxieties which, far from helping to breach the predominant forms of atomization and isolation in society, actually reinforce and intensify them? On all sides today we detect something in the nature of a flight from society into new forms of community, into various "groups". These trends are not easy to evaluate, of course, but they undoubtedly reflect a certain longing for new experiences of community and for richer relationships within our complex social life which often makes communications between human beings too specialized and over-organized and thereby creates new and artificial forms of isolation and loneliness which increase the poverty of human relationships and can set in motion new mechanisms of oppression.

Here more than ever we owe it to ourselves and to our milieu to bear witness as a fellowship of hope which itself embraces many

vigorous forms of "togetherness in his name" and is constantly inspiring and encouraging new forms as well. It is essential here that ministers especially, but also the members of councils and the representatives of associations, should bear in mind the dangers arising from the Church's own official structures and administrative machinery, and from the institutional pressures inherent in them, for a living experience of fellowship. The fact is that many today find this official appearance of the Church painful and feel just as much at the mercy of the same social pressures and mechanisms within it as they do in their milieu in general. They become alienated or resigned. More than ever, and more urgently than ever, therefore, we need a lively sense of this danger in our Church today. Only if we assess at their true value the official specializations and organizations and their indispensable ministerial function, and avoid elevating their concrete forms to the status of unalterable divinely ordained expressions of the Church, shall we also acquire sufficient inner mobility in the life of the Church to be able to make the witness of a living fellowship of hope a reality within an over-organized, depersonalized society.

PART II: THE ONE WITNESS AND THE MANY MESSENGERS OF HOPE

1. Within the world in which we live

The context in which we in the community of the Church attest our hope and seek to be renewed by our hope has long ceased to that of a society shaped by religion. Fearful of an inner loss of meaning and of increasing insignificance, our church life is caught between the danger of becoming encapsulated in a separate religious world, through timidity or in an elitist spirit, or else of accommodating itself overmuch to a milieu on the definition and form of which it no longer has much influence. The road pointed out for us by our hope, the road to the renewal of the Church, lies right through this milieu with its experiences and memories, with its indifference or even tactical benevolence towards the Church, and with its repudiation of the Church as a residuary source hostile to liberation in our society, as a place where supposed knowledge and creative curiosity are deliberately suppressed and any concern with freedom and justice merely a pretence.

2. The witness of a life based on hope

In this situation the road the Church must travel is that of a life based on hope. This road is also the only way to the renewal of the Church. And it leads us to the only response we can ultimately make to all forms of doubt and disappointment, repudiation and indifference. Are we what we profess in the witness of our hope? Is our church life determined by the spirit and the strength of this hope? A Church which is conformed to this hope is also ultimately conformed to the present, and if it is not conformed to this hope no aggiornamento, however impressive, can help it. "The world" needs no duplication

of its hopelessness in a religious form. What it needs and seeks (if anything) is the counterweight, the explosive force of a life based on hope. And what we in the Church owe to the world is to make good the deficit of a life manifestly based on hope. In this sense, the question of our present responsibility and present significance is ultimately the question of our Christian identity: are we what we profess in the witness of our hope?

3. Patterned on Jesus Christ

The crisis in the life of the Church is due in the last analysis not to difficulties in adjusting to modern life and the modern spirit, but rather to difficulties in conforming to him in whom our hope is anchored and from whose being it receives its height and depth, its direction and its future: namely, Jesus Christ with his message of "the Kingdom of God". In practice have we not taken care not to be too conformed to him, and protected his spirit like an open fire whose sparks must not be allowed to carry too far? Have we not by excessive anxiety and routine lulled to sleep the heart's enthusiasms and pushed people to dangerous alternatives: Jesus, yes - Church, no? Why is it He seems so much more "modern" and "up to date" than his Church? If the Church is to be renewed, therefore, we must above all overcome our difficulties in adapting ourselves to him to whom we appeal and by whom we live, and become more consistent in our discipleship of him, so as to narrow the gap between him and us and make our destined fellowship with him a living reality. Then there is a real way and a real future. Then there is a possibility of being modern, fully up to date - of sharing the problems, questions and sufferings on all sides but without succumbing to their covert hopelessness.

The strength to do this we achieve from the confident faith that the very life of Christ has been implanted in the Church, that we have been baptized into the death and victory of Christ and that his Spirit, who alone enables us to confess that "Jesus is Lord" (cf. I Cor 12:3), guides us! But this certitude also makes us free to understand ourselves to be - in the words of the recent Vatican Council - a Church of sinners, and even to confess that we are a sinful Church. It frees us, in face of the crisis in our church life, nor to lapse into a fruitless self-detraction nor to seek dispiritedly and self-righteously to lay the blame for indifference and defection solely on "the others", on "the wicked world" and precisely in this way to suppress the call to repentance and costly change or to drown it by mere appeals to hang on.

When we examine ourselves critically, it must not be because we adopt a fashionable critical approach but because we do not wish to impair the majesty and invincibility of our hope. We Christians certainly do not hope in ourselves and so we have no need either to constantly divide our present life and our own history in half and point always only to the sunny side in the manner of those ideologies which have no other hope than hope in themselves. In this sense, willingness to criticize our-

selves is a witness of our distinctive Christian hope which guides the Church again and again to a vigorous searching of conscience.

4. The people of God as messenger of hope

The obligation to bear witness to this living hope as disciples of Jesus rests upon all because all are sent on this path of hope, all are called to be his disciples - summoned to belong to the fellowship of believers, equipped and guided by the Spirit of God whom he has promised to his Church (cf. John 14:26; Rom 8:14, 26). All therefore, without exception, must be and become participants in the continuing renewal of our Church. It is, of course, impossible to command this renewal, nor is it accomplished merely by specific reforms decided by the Synod. The one discipleship calls for many disciples, the one witness for many witnesses, the one hope for many messengers. In the last analysis, it is only in this way that an attempt to bring renewal to the Church can become a renewal of our Church itself. Only in this way can we, in our manifestly transitional situation, advance from being an apparently protectionist Church for the people to being a living Church of the people in which all realize that they are in their different ways responsible for the destiny of this Church and involved in its public witness to hope. Only in this way, too, shall we avoid the impression that we are a Church which, while still receiving support from a strong (only slowly disintegrating) milieu, is not really supported by its people.

All this also means, of course, that the ministers in our Church, the "appointed witnesses", need more than ever today to be particularly receptive and sensitive to the extremely diverse forms and agents of the witness to lived hope and practised discipleship within our Church and not infrequently even at the fringes of its institutional life. Ultimately, of course, they will always need to examine and to analyse but definitely not just to critically survey these but always to do so with a feeling for everything which enables us to live and communicate our hope convincingly and not simply to talk about it. Ministry in the Church, which is subject to the law of the Spirit of God, ultimately not only has the duty to guard against false spirits, to discern the spirits, but also the duty to seek the Spirit and constantly to allow for his incalculable and often disturbing spontaneity.

PART III: WAYS OF DISCIPLESHIP

The confession of Jesus Christ directs us to discipleship. Discipleship is the price of our solidarity with him, the price of our orthodoxy; it is the only hallmark of the way to the Church's renewal. It is not in some else's programmes or in ideologies that we find our identity as Christians but only in discipleship.

There are as many forms of lived hope, as many ways to renewal of the Church, as there are ways of discipleship. Here we can

mention only a few of these ways - as signposts for our contemporary church life. We preface our remarks with a statement about the obedience of Jesus as the central theme of discipleship. The other postures - poverty, freedom and joy - which are often not seen and familiar or very seldom seen or familiar in our church life - derive from this obedience of Jesus.

1. The way of obedience to the cross

The way of discipleship to Jesus always leads us into that obedience to the Father which permeates the whole life of Jesus and without which that life is quite inaccessible to us. This obedience of Jesus is also the source of Jesus' characteristic friendliness to others, of his solidarity with the outcast and the oppressed, with the sinners and the lost. For the picture of God which shines through in the poverty accompanying the obedience of Jesus, in the complete surrender of his life to the Father, is not that of an oppressive divine tyrant; nor is it the picture of God as the epitome of earthly lordship and authority. It is the glowing picture of the God who lifts up and liberates, who opens up to the guilty and the humiliated a new promising future and comes to meet them with the outstretched arms of his mercy. The life of discipleship is a life which assumes this poverty of Jesus in his obedience. In prayer we hazard this poverty, this unqualified surrender of our life to the Father. Out of this attitude grows the living witness of God our hope in the midst of our milieu.

This witness demands a high price, this obedience involves a great risk, and it leads to a life between many battle lines. Jesus was neither a fool nor a rebel: but He could obviously be mistaken for either. In the end He was derided by Herod as a fool and handed over by his own countrymen as a rebel to be crucified. Anyone who follows him, anyone who does not shrink from obedience to him, anyone who does not refuse the cup He offers, must allow for the same possibility of being the victim of such confusion and finding himself between many fronts - again and again, more and more.

If we take these ways of discipleship in our church life, we shall ourselves experience the cross too. But in the church life of our country we are perhaps ourselves already too rigidly and inflexibly incorporated into the system and interest of our social life. Perhaps we have already allowed ourselves to become too conformed by accepting, largely, the place and role which has been dictated to us not simply by the will of God but by the uncomplicated desire of our total "society of wants" to maintain itself and by a concern that it should function as smoothly as possible. Perhaps we already seem too much like a social agency for the relief of painful disappointments, the welcome disarming of uncomprehended fears and the suppression of dangerous memories and awkward expectations. We must face up squarely to the danger of such an insidious conformity to the dominant social expectations, the danger of becoming a religion of prosperity instead of a religion of the cross. For if we do succumb to this danger we are of service to no one, neither to God nor man.

2. The way of poverty

The way of discipleship also leads always into another form of poverty and freedom, namely that of the love by which Jesus in the end "outwitted" even death itself, since he no longer possessed anything death could despoil him of. Discipleship calls us to this poverty and freedom of love, which knows it is sent to all.

It calls us again and again to solidarity with the poor and weak in our society, without exception. A church fellowship which follows in the steps of Jesus must not be surprised when it is despised by the "clever and powerful" (I Cor 1:19-31). But, for the sake of this discipleship it cannot afford to be despised by the "poor and weak", by those who "have no one" (cf. Jn 5:7). For these are the favoured ones for Jesus and so they must also be the favoured ones for his Church. They in particular must know that we are their champions. This lends supreme importance to all those new ventures in discipleship in our Church which counteract the danger of our becoming by our social composition a bourgeois religion which has become almost a complete stranger to real suffering, real poverty and distress, to social failure and social ostracism, and which even views this suffering itself only through the spectacles, and judges it only by the standards of a wealthy society. Ultimately we shall survive our intellectual despisers more easily than the unspoken doubts of the poor and weak and their memories of the Church's failure. And in the last analysis, how could we possibly offer in a credible and effective manner that resistance which the message of Jesus opposes to the abundant society, if we have the reputation of being a rich Church?

3. The way of freedom

The way of discipleship leading to the renewal of our church life and to a living witness to our Christian hope is always at the same time a way to freedom, to the freedom of Jesus which accrued to him from his complete surrender to the Father and made him free to oppose social prejudices and idols and to champion, above all, the people being destroyed by these prejudices and idols. The whole of his life and ministry is bathed in the radiance of this freedom. And if our appeal to him is not to bring down the severest criticism upon ourselves, this freedom must shine through all our church life too. "Dying we still live on; disciplined by suffering, we are not done to death; in our sorrows we have always cause for joy; poor ourselves, we bring wealth to many; penniless, we own the world" (II Cor 6:9f). By prayer we root ourselves in this freedom. For praying makes us free, free from that fear which causes the imaginativeness of our love to wither away and throws us helplessly back into anxiety about ourselves.

The freedom which is the gift of fellowship with Christ and the Father constantly pushes our church life into the adventure of the freedom of God's children: "For though everything belongs to you - Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life and death, the present and the future, all of them belong to you- yet you belong

to Christ, and Christ to God" (I Cor 3:21-23). In practice this all-embracing adventure of freedom is also found whenever people renounce the fulfilment of their love in marriage and the family in order to follow Jesus and because the new life of God constrains them to do this. This life of God relativizes our human wants and fulfilments and by doing so is able to free us for our deepest hope, a hope which by transcending the provisional makes the distinctively Christian element in freedom crystal clear.

Aware of this liberated freedom we should also finally learn to assess more objectively the contemporary history of social freedom by whose fruits we all of us live today, even we in the Church, and which itself owes so much not least to the historical impulsions of Jesus' message of freedom, even though these were often released into history without the Church and even in opposition to the Church. In view of this freedom of the children of God we can also boldly develop further the belatedly initiated steps in the direction of freedom within the Church, the readiness, at least announced, to live with the questions and objections of critical freedom, and do so without running the risk of simply subordinating the freedom of Jesus to an ideal of freedom which dominates our society. Here we are summoned to resist that view of freedom which denies the achievement of freedom in personal loyalty and obligation or makes it an excessively private matter and precisely for this reason also endangers the public recognition of the principles of married fellowship.

4. The way of joy

Ways of discipleship; ways to the renewal of our church life: in the end these are always ways to that joy which entered our world through the life and message of Jesus Christ and proved itself invincible through his resurrection. This joy is closely related to the child's sense of our hope and therefore equally remote from both artificial or desparately forced spontaneity and from an optimism of nature unspoiled by civilization. It is difficult to speak about it and easy to say more than is necessary. In truth it can only be contemplated and experienced in those who enter into discipleship and in this way travel the road of their hope. It is experienced above all where the baptized "with unaffected joy" (Acts 2:46) celebrate the memorial of Jesus and, in him, the saving acts of God which are the basis of our hope.

The Church has from time immemorial contemplated this joy in those whom it honours as its saints and whose biographies it preserves not least as authentications of Christian joy - as narratives of the joy of a Christian. So too it sings the Magnificat of Mary, the mother of our Lord, throughout the centuries because, in the words of the Council, it "contemplates with joy in her as in a picture what it desires and hopes itself to be".

Today especially this joy is an excellent testimony to the hope that is in us. In a time when faith and the hope which springs

from faith are increasingly exposed publicly to the suspicion of being illusory projections, this joy in particular carries conviction: for in the long run it is something we are least able to simulate to ourselves or to others. The ultimate aim of all renewal of our church life, therefore, is that this joy should be reflected in countless ways in the countenance of the Church and thus the witness of hope will become in our society an invitation to joy.

PART IV: PROGRAMMES FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH AND SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

Our Church in the Federal Republic of Germany believes and confesses itself to be part of the one Catholic Church. It is therefore involved in the situation and tasks of the whole Church. No section of the one Church lives for itself, today less than ever. In speaking of its own way and its own task, it will always have to look beyond its own situation to the whole Church. Its orientation must always be "catholic"; the criteria it applies to itself must always be those of the universal Church. Our German Church must also recognize there the programmes and tasks which fall to it here and now on behalf of the whole Church in virtue of our own historical and social situation. It must earnestly pray God, therefore, for those historical and social charismata which will be its distinctive contribution to the "building of the body of Christ". And in a time when the world is rapidly abandoning its divided historical and social habitats and growing more and more into an interdependent and richly diverse unity, our Church must also explain what the overall social tasks are which confront it because of the situation from which it starts. In conclusion, therefore, we shall mention some specific programmes and obligations of our Church in the Federal Republic in the service of the whole Church and society as a whole. These especially can provide criteria to test the spirit of our hope and an opportunity for the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power".

1. For real unity among Christians

We are the Church of the country of the Reformation. The history of the great religious division in western Christendom has left a profound mark on the church history of our country. We therefore recognize that we have a very special obligation to tackle that ecumenical, truly "catholic" task of striving for a new and vital unity of Christians in truth and love. We therefore regard the spur given by the recent Council in this direction as also pointing the way and providing special directives for our Church in the Federal Republic of Germany. The manifest newly awakened longing for unity must not be allowed to peter out. We must not make light of or gloss over the scandal of divided Christendom which becomes daily more scandalous in face of the rapid movement of the world towards interdependence and unity. Nor must we ignore or underestimate the practical possibilities and departure points for achieving unity in a responsible way. Certainly the source of this unity is the reconciling act of God but it also depends on our action

in his Spirit, on the vital renewal of our church life by our discipleship of the one Lord.

The integrity and vitality of our will to unity should be expressed and attested not least in our special spiritual fellowship and practical solidarity with all those Christians throughout the world who are persecuted for their Christian faith.

2. For a new relationship to the religious history of the Jewish people

The recent political history of our own country was darkened by the systematic attempt to wipe out the Jewish people. And in that period of National Socialism, despite the exemplary conduct of certain individuals and groups, we were, taken as a whole, a church community which pursued its own way and more or less turned its back on the fate of the persecuted Jewish people, a church community whose outlook made it focus far too much on the threat to its own institutions and which remained silent about the crimes perpetrated against the Jews and the Jewish religion. In many cases people became guilty out of sheer naked fear for their lives. The fact that Christians cooperated in this persecution afflicts us especially grievously. The practical sincerity of our desire for renewal also depends on our acknowledging our guilt and our willingness to learn from this sinful history of our country and even of our Church. The German Church must be the first to watch out for all tendencies to whittle away human rights and to abuse political power, the first to demonstrate its special readiness to assist all who are persecuted today on racist or other ideological grounds and, above all, to assume its special responsibilities for the relationship of the whole Church to the Jewish people and its religion, a relationship which is so heavily burdened by the past.

We in Germany of all people have no right to deny or belittle the importance of the connection between the people of the old covenant and the people of the new in the divine salvation, as seen and proclaimed by the apostle Paul. For in this sense, too, we in our country have become debtors to the Jewish people. In face of a horror as monstrous as that of Auschwitz, the credibility of our message of the "God of hope" depends ultimately and above all on the fact that there were countless men and women, Jews and Christians, who even in such a hell as that, even after experiencing such a hell as that, continued to confess and call on this God of hope. Here is one of the tasks of our people which also applies in face of the attitude of other nations and of world opinion to the Jewish people. In our view, one of the special obligations of the German Church within the universal Church is to work for a new relationship of Christians to the Jewish people and to its religious history.

3. For table-fellowship with the poor churches

Obviously we are the Church of a comparatively rich and economically powerful country. We therefore wish and are constrained

to acknowledge our special ecumenical obligation and mission in relation to the churches of the Third World. This obligation also has deep theological and ecclesiological roots and does not stem merely from the dictates of a social or political programme. What we owe to ourselves and to the world, in the last analysis, is the living picture of the new people of God, gathered together in unity at the great banquet of the Lord. It cannot therefore be a question only of giving to others out of superfluities but must also be a matter of renouncing our own legitimate wishes and plans.

In the service of the one Church we cannot allow the life of the Church in the western world to present more and more the appearance of a religion of prosperity and abundance while in other parts of the world it operates as the popular religion of the unfortunate whose lack of bread literally excludes them from our eucharistic banquet. Otherwise we present to the world the scandalous picture of a Church which embraces both the unfortunate and the spectators of misfortune, the many sufferers and the many Pilates, and simply labels this totality the one eucharistic community of believers, the one new people of God. In the last analysis, the one world Church cannot simply be just one more reflection of the social divisions of our world. If it is, it simply plays irresponsibly into the hands of those who in any case explain religion and the Church away as no more than the epitome of existing social conditions.

We in our country, especially, must act, help and share - in the realization that we are the one people of God which has been called to be the agent in a new history rich in promise and to share in the one banquet of the Lord as the great sacrament of this new history. The costs we are required to pay for this are not a belated act of charity but are really the necessary expenses of our catholicity, our living expenses as God's people, the price of our orthodoxy.

4. For a future fit for human beings to live in

We are the Church of a highly developed industrial and technological country. It is becoming clearer and clearer to us today that there are limits to this growth, indeed that limits to economic expansion, to the use of raw materials and energy, to living space, to the exploitation of the environment and nature make it impossible for all countries to develop economically to the level of prosperity we now have and enjoy. In face of this situation, what is required of us - if humankind is to survive in any humanly worthwhile manner - is a radical change in our patterns of living, a drastic transformation in our economic and social priorities and all this within so predictably short a space of time that it is hardly realistic to expect any gradual process of learning and adaptation untroubled by conflicts. What we are being required to do is to refocus our interests and radically revise the aims of our performance. But we also need new forms of self-discipline, of collective asceticism, so to speak. Shall we be able to produce what is demanded of us in this situation and to do so without violence? What is certain is that this situation will be a testing ground for the moral

reserves in our highly developed societies and for their readiness to assume responsibility for all men. Who is to set this required, far-reaching transformation of our consciousness and ways of living in motion and provide it with effective motive power?

Our Church cannot stand on the touchline here in an attitude of malicious apocalyptic glee - though it will ask itself whether, in this situation of human society as a whole, we are not beginning again to experience publicly and collectively what seemed once to be attributable only to the isolated private experience of the individual mortal, namely, the externally imposed limitation of our life-span. Nevertheless the Church must direct the moral resources dormant in Christianity specifically to these major tasks set by this new social situation. It must mobilize these forces in the interest of a more worthwhile life for the economically and socially handicapped nations and in opposition to the ruthless economic colonialism practised by the stronger societies; in the interest of preserving a habitable world for future generations and in opposition to the egoistic impoverishment of the future by those living today. We Christians in the Federal Republic should be the last to shut our eyes to these worldwide problems if we do not wish to slacken or distort the standards of our Christian hope.

Undoubtedly these standards also offer us a hopeful creative approach to every human life in a time when the fear of stirring up life rules just below the surface. But surely every child is a living embodiment of hope for the future! Accepted as a gift from God every child carries within itself a new gleam of hope for the future of the nation and the Church. The standards implicit in our hope also require us to champion the public defence of every human life in face of a development in which the possibilities and dangers of the final discoverable secret of human existence, namely, of biological life itself, coming increasingly within reach of our capacity to manipulate are increasing and with this the danger also of reducing man to the level of a work of our own hands. The threat to a worthy human life also extends today in a new way to the human situation when facing death. Many dying people, although surrounded with every care medical skill can provide, still find themselves deprived of all human intimacy in their last hours. This situation presents Christians in particular with a most urgent task, namely, of seeing to it that no human being meets death in solitude.

Our willing acceptance of responsibilities for all men also proves itself by our championship of justice, freedom and peace in the world. The mission committed to us by our hope thus brings us close to all who strive unselfishly for these things and who resist all forms of oppression which distort the human face. All our plans are judged ultimately by the standard of the "one hope to which we have been called" (cf. Eph 4:4). This hope is not born in ignorance nor does it drive us at random. It is rooted in Christ and what it seeks even in us Christians of the late twentieth century is the expectation of his return. It transforms us ever anew into human beings who, amid their historical experiences and struggles, lift up their heads and look eagerly for the messianic "day of the Lord". "Then I saw

a new heaven and a new earth ... I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: 'Now at last God has his dwelling among men! He will dwell among them and they shall be his people and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes; there will be an end to death and to mourning and crying and pain' ... Then he who sat on the throne said: 'Behold! I am making all things new'" (Rev 21:1, 3-5).

An Affirmation of Faith
from a Prayerbook of German
University and High School Students

I believe in God, the Father,
and hear his word.
He is the Lord,
to him belongs the universe,
he directs history.
Joy in all creation,
reverence for life
and courage to act come from him.
He has lived our life.
With him a new world began,
which will be without war and hunger,
disease and death.
With him all guilt ends.
He was crucified,
but God has wakened him from death
and so founded our freedom.
I believe in the Holy Spirit
and am led by him.
He gives knowledge of truth
and sharpens the conscience.
He creates one Church for all men
until the completion of the world in righteousness.
Amen.

(Source: Mitten unter uns. Gottesdienstordnungen und Gebete.
Translation by Wolfgang Roth)

Text in: Creeds. A Report of the Committee on Christian Faith,
United Church of Canada, Division of Mission, 1975,
p. 21



V N O R T H A M E R I C A

A Modern Affirmation

(from the Methodist Hymnal, USA 1966)

We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power and love, whose mercy is over all his works, and whose will is ever directed to his children's good.

We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, the gift of the Father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.

We believe in the Holy Spirit as the Divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need.

We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the Service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth.
Amen.

Text in: Creeds, A Report of the Committee on Christian Faith, United Church of Canada, Division of Mission, 1975, p. 37

The Statement of Faith
of the North American Area Council
of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

(Submitted in 1965 to its constituent churches)

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator, Sustainer and Sovereign Lord of all, who rules over all for the fulfilment of his holy, wise and loving purposes in the world.

And in Jesus Christ, his Son our Saviour and Lord, through whose perfect sacrificial life and death, and triumphant resurrection and exaltation, we have forgiveness and are reconciled to God and to one another.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, through whose indwelling working we are brought into the fellowship of the church, the body of Christ. In this fellowship we become partakers of his mighty power to renew life in all its relationships, persuaded that, for life here and hereafter, he is able to do for us and in us and through us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

In this faith we worship the one God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and commit ourselves in humble penitence and grateful trust to his service in the world.

Text in: Creeds, o.c., p. 19

A Confession of Faith

Used at the Edmonton Regional Conference
of the Student Christian Movement in 1962

In the middle of my confusion,
I believe in thee,
Because I have, just now, understood my confusion
and felt that my confusion was understood.

I believe in thee,
Because in the beginning, which is my beginning,
You brought order out of chaos,
You brought creation out of void,
In the middle of all our confusion,
I believe in thee.
Because
Right in the middle of my confusion,
Just when I could not stand it any longer,
You came.
It couldn't have been clearer.
When you came, you really came,
Right in the middle of the world's confusion,
There were all kinds of political tensions,
There were economic blocks.
There were prejudicial viewings this way and that,
and viewings with alarm.

And just so
When you died, you really showed us our confusion.
You made the confusion really into the confusion that it is,
Because you died.
When you died, you really
threw things into the greatest confusion.

Only then did you rise,
And bring a little order into things.

And you did rise, and you did assure us all,
that over and beyond,
and above everything on earth is the
eternal purpose and the
eternal promise
and the eternal presence of God.

Which is the communion of saints,
Which is the baptism,
Which is the Church,
And thank God, I belong,
At this instant,
To this body.

At this instant, at least,
Thank God,
I belong. Amen.

Text in: Creeds, o.c., p. 19-20

A Creed

United Church of Canada

In 1965 the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual of the United Church of Canada asked the Committee on Christian Faith of that same Church to attempt to draft a brief profession of faith suitable for liturgical use, especially in the administration of baptism. Together with a report on the status and authority of the classical creeds of the Church, a collection and examination of a number of representative modern statements of faith, a new creed was submitted to the 23rd General Council of the United Church of Canada in 1968 and adopted. After slight modifications this "New Creed" was given general approval for use in congregations and included in the Service Book. We publish the most recently revised version from 1980.

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

Who has created and is creating,
Who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
Who works in us and others
By the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

To celebrate God's presence,
To love and serve others,
To seek justice and resist evil,
To proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
Our judge and our Hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Text also in: L. Vischer (ed.), *Reformed Witness Today*, O.C.,
p. 196

OKOUMENE



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The series “Confessing our Faith around the World” publishes new expressions of the apostolic faith in the twentieth century from all over the world. This second volume presents confessions of faith from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America.

